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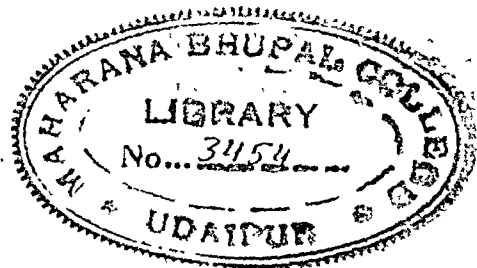
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1909



## PREFACE.

ONE main purpose for which these selections have been collected is well stated in the "Suggestions for the Consideration of Teachers" issued by the Board of Education:—"In nature study teaching a number of reading books on natural history and country life have been prepared, but they should be very sparingly used. Reading about birds and insects and the like may kindle observation, but too often becomes a substitute for it. Natural history reading books, again, have an unhappy way of repeating well-worn errors and slipshod half-truths. If a nature study reading book be wanted, an endeavour should be made to secure one containing descriptions by original observers, and not mere accounts put together by a compiler." Such a book as this fully satisfies these requirements, and, at the same time, it is hoped that it will do much more, by fostering in the boys and girls who read it a love of the works of Richard Jefferies, to which it attempts to introduce them.

I have been indebted for many facts of Jefferies' life to Edward Thomas's "Richard Jefferies, His Life and Work," a book which will always be very dear to all lovers of Jefferies.

My thanks are due to Messrs. Chatto and Windus.

for the kind permission to include extracts from "The Open Air," "The Life of the Fields," and "Nature near London;" to Messrs. Macmillan and Co. for the extract from "The Dewy Morn;" to Messrs. Smith, Elder and Co. for that from "Wild Life in a Southern County;" and to Messrs. Longmans, Green, and Co. for the extracts from "Field and Hedgerow," "Red Deer," and "Wood Magic."

F. W. T.

## INTRODUCTION.

JOHN RICHARD JEFFERIES was born at Coate, a Wiltshire hamlet on the high road that runs from Marlborough to Swindon, and not more than three miles from the latter place, on November 6, 1848.

His father, James Jefferies, and his mother, Elizabeth Gyde, were both Londoners by birth, but were descended from West-country yeoman stock, the Jefferies having been for many generations farmers in the neighbourhood of Swindon, and the Gydes similarly farmers living near Painswick, in Gloucestershire.

We can gather much about his boyhood from his writings. His home life was not perhaps at times particularly pleasurable. In his youth the shadow of somewhat straitened circumstances came over the house, and his mother, born and reared in London, was perhaps in some respects unsuited for the monotony of a quiet country life. His father, original and eccentric in many ways, delighted in the garden, the orchard, and the hedgerows around the house. He knew all the trees and flowers and birds, and often took his son into the fields and talked with him about them, thus starting the boy on those observations of nature, the records of which were to form so important a part of his life's work. In one of his novels, "*Amaryllis at the Fair*," Jefferies has reproduced many of his father's characteristics in the person of Farmer Iden. This is one picture of him: "A man was busy putting in potatoes; he wore the



## INTRODUCTION

raggedest coat ever seen on a respectable back. As the wind lifted the tails, it was apparent that the lining was loose, and only hung in threads; the cuffs were worn through; there was a hole beneath each arm, and on each shoulder the nap of the cloth was gone, the colour which had once been grey was now a mixture of several soils and numerous kinds of grit.

"The way in which he was planting potatoes was wonderful. Every potato was placed at exactly the right distance apart, and a hole made for it in the general trench; before it was set, it was looked at and turned over, and the thumb rubbed against it, to be sure that it was sound, and when finally put in, a little mould was delicately adjusted round to keep it in its right position till the whole row was buried. Had he been planting his own children, he could not have been more careful. The science, the skill, and the experience brought to the potato-planting you would hardly credit; for all this care was founded upon observation, and arose from very large abilities on the part of the planter, though directed to so humble a purpose at that moment."

The hamlet of Coate lies on the north slope of the Marlborough Downs, with Marlborough and Savernake Forest less than a dozen miles to the south, and Wayland Smith's cave and the Vale of the White Horse some eight miles to the east. We may gain some idea of this downland, with its sarsen-stones and tumuli, its wide expanses of open turf, its beech and ash and fir and twisted oak, its bramble thickets and hazel copses, and its lanes where the ruts are white with chalk, by reading "Sir Bevis and the Wind." The hamlet itself is often described by Jefferies in his writings. In "My Old Village" he has pictured it as it was in the days of his boyhood and youth, with its groups of thatched cottages up crooked lanes, hidden away by the elms as if out of sight in a

cupboard, its overarching oaks, its brooks and meadow footpaths. It was in one of its farmhouses, Coate Farm, that Jefferies was born. The farmstead had been a family possession for several generations, except for one or two short intervals during which it passed out of their hands, to be recovered quickly, until it was finally lost to the family in the time of Jefferies' father. It was at that time a small freehold farm of some forty acres of grass-land, suitable for keeping cows and for dairy farming. The house stood by the silent and dusty country road, secluded within the great walls of the garden, above which rose a row of lime trees, which helped to screen it from the road. His father, ever fond of trees, had considerably improved its surroundings by planting trees of various kinds about it, and we may realize something of the house and its garden and orchard by reading "*Birds of the Farmhouse*" and "*Meadow Thoughts*." Close to the farm were the Burderop Woods, part of an estate at that time rich in game and visited by poachers, and a large reservoir, originally constructed to feed a neighbouring canal, which abounded in fish and was frequented by water-loving birds.

It was amid such surroundings as these that Jefferies grew to manhood. His education was of a somewhat desultory character. Between the ages of four and nine, he spent a considerable portion of each year with his mother's sister, Mrs. Harrild, who lived at Sydenham, and was always one of his best friends. Here he went to a preparatory school, kept by a lady, and on his return to Coate, he attended schools at Swindon. His father helped him to understand the Bible and Shakespeare, and there were other books in which he was soon deeply interested—"Pilgrim's Progress," Percy's "*Reliques*," "*The Odyssey*," "*Don Quixote*," "*Faust*," Fenimore Cooper's Indian tales, and others,—and throughout his life he remained fond of books, and read widely. If we may

trust a portrait of himself as Felix in one of his books, "After London," he cared little for the ordinary outdoor games of boyhood, and lacked something of that bodily strength and vigour which might have enabled him to excel in them. In consequence, he became somewhat reserved and dreamy, quick to take offence where none was really intended, and independent and determined to the last degree.

The fields and reservoir afforded him and his brother an admirable playing-ground. Bevis in "Wood Magic" is Jefferies himself living in the fields at Coate, and conversing with animals and trees and wind and brook; while in "Bevis: The Story of a Boy," we have a picture of his later boyhood with his brother Harry, who is depicted as Mark. Swimming, fishing, boating, skating, mimic battles and adventures filled their days, and he drank in the beauty of the scene in all its fulness, and learned to recognize in all their details the varied animal and vegetable life of field and pond and hedgerow. He was already of a somewhat dreamy disposition, fond of sauntering about alone, and showing neither fitness for a farmer's life, nor any desire to follow it. Soon he became the proud possessor of a gun, and spent much time in long walks on the Downs and round about the farm, doing little work at home, and conspicuous to his neighbours as an idler, while a friendship with Haylock, the Burderop keeper, gave him an entry to the woods and further instruction in sporting and hunting.

So he passed his time, until at seventeen years of age he was confronted with the necessity of earning a living and commenced work as a reporter on the *North Wilts Herald*, a local paper published at Swindon. He had already made some attempts at writing, and besides the usual routine work of a reporter's life, he contributed poetry and stories to the paper. His reading hours were now mainly occupied with history and antiquities,

especially those of his own neighbourhood, and he wrote several historical and descriptive articles on places around Swindon. Thus journalism became his profession—a pursuit enabling him to spend, and indeed necessitating his spending, much time out of doors.

At nineteen he suffered from a severe illness which left him very weak for a time; but he was back at work as soon as possible, his work including novels which he hoped would one day make him a rich man. In 1872 he completed a novel which the publishers would not accept, and in the next year a political pamphlet, a handbook on reporting, editing, and authorship, and a memoir of the Goddards, a country family of North Wiltshire.

Meanwhile, in 1872, the *Times* newspaper had published a long letter of his dealing with the condition of the Wiltshire farm labourer. This was followed by two more on the same topic, and he continued the vein by writing articles on farming and farm life for the magazines; articles ranging over a variety of subjects, such as Allotments, Women in the Field, the Labourer's Daily Life and Home, etc. In the same year (1874) his first published novel, "The Scarlet Shawl," appeared, and he was married.

Next year another novel followed, entitled "Restless Human Hearts"; another, "World's End," two years later; and another, "Greene Ferne Farm," in 1879. He was also continuing his essays on country life in the *Graphic*, *Pall Mall Gazette*, and other papers and magazines; and in 1877 he had moved to Surbiton to be nearer the publishers and the British Museum Library. Here he continued his walks and records of nature, records which provided rich material for essays on nature near London. In 1878 some of his work for the *Pall Mall Gazette* was reprinted in book form as "The Gamekeeper at Home." Burderop Woods and Haylock the keeper, the fields and reservoir at Coate, the events of his youth, and the tales he had heard, are formed into a rich and

abundant description of one aspect of country life. Of Coate and its inhabitants he could write lucidly and completely, and he continued to draw upon his powerful memory and store of notes in writing "*Wild Life in a Southern County*," a chapter of which—"Birds of the Farmhouse"—is incorporated in this book. In his next collected essays he appeared as "*The Amateur Poacher*," and this was followed by "*Round about a Great Estate*" (1880), a book reminiscent of Coate and of Day House Farm (his wife's home at Coate), and the workers there. Next year came "*Wood Magic*," and then "*Bevis*"; and in 1883 the fruits of his observations around London were collected as "*Nature near London*." To the same year belongs his most remarkable work, "*The Story of My Heart*," in which he traces the evolution of his mental and spiritual development, and describes his love of nature and its influence over his thoughts and feelings.

Unfortunately, in 1881 his health again gave way, and repeated operations failed to bring relief to him. A visit to Exmoor resulted in a book about the Red Deer (1884), and the same year saw another novel, "*The Dewy Morn*," and a collection of essays, "*The Life of the Fields*," containing some of his best work, such as "*The Pageant of Summer*" and "*Meadow Thoughts*" in these selections. Next year came still another novel, "*After London*," and another set of essays published under the title of "*The Open Air*."

It was in this year, too, that health finally forsook him, and he moved from London to Crowborough, in Sussex, for the sake of fresh country air. He had before this lived for a time at Hove within reach of sea and down land; and finally, in 1886, he went to Goring, near Worthing, where the remainder of his short life was spent. He had perforce to continue his work during his illness, and when too weak to write dictated to his wife. In 1887 appeared his best novel, "*Amaryllis at the Fair*," written

while on a sick-bed and in constant pain. In this book he once more returned to Coate for inspiration, and painted its surroundings and people, and his father and mother and relations with faithful memory, but with the chastened and saddened thoughts that years of toil and pain had brought him. It was his last work published during his lifetime, for in the same year he died and was buried in the cemetery at Broadwater, Worthing, in a spot which he himself had chosen.

During this last year he continued writing or dictating, rejecting proffered help with all the independence of spirit that had marked his boyhood, and his last essays were collected by his widow and published under the title "Field and Hedgerow." In one of these essays—"Hours of Spring"—he thinks of the birds and grass and corn, which he had loved so well, and wonders how they can manage without him. Through his window he can hear the lark singing high up against a grey cloud, and each note falls into his heart like a knife; and in another essay—"My Old Village"—he goes back in spirit to Coate for the last time.

We may roughly divide his work into two parts—novels and studies of nature. The novels, considered as such, were never very successful. His own life lacked those opportunities of intercourse with all sorts and conditions of men which were necessary to enable him successfully to portray a wide range of characters, and his characters are successful in proportion as they are drawn from the circle of his relations and acquaintances, as in "Amaryllis." The novels charm most of all by the delightful backgrounds of nature in which the characters live and move, and such a background has been pieced together from one of the chapters of "The Dewy Morn" to form the selection which is here entitled "August Thunder."

From the circumstances under which they were written his essays are of unequal merit. In the best of them he is a writer of poetic prose, simple and lucid in style, describing with the bodily eye, but interpreting and commenting with the inward, and illuminating the facts with the play of his fancy. The greatest of his essays is perhaps "The Pageant of Summer," in which he passes in review all the procession of living and growing things to be seen abroad on a summer day, being, as he says, "at heart at least for ever roaming about the woodlands and the hills and by the brooks," and muses on it all. In "Wheat Fields near London" it is midsummer, and the white flowers of June suggest to him that midsummer is a bride, and should therefore be decked in white, though it is a white embroidered with other hues. So also in "Meadow Thoughts," it is the prodigality of Nature which pleases him, as she flings her treasures abroad, squandering millions of seeds, luxurious carpets of petals, and green mountains of oak leaves. In his earliest essays, on the other hand, as for example in "Birds of the Farmhouse," he is often simply descriptive, writing down objectively all he sees, but not himself entering subjectively into the vision. At times, too, he is obviously utilizing the materials collected in his notebooks, and one selection, "Mixed Days of May and December," has been included to show the use he made of these collected observations. In all his work one is struck by the close insight and perfection of detail of his wonderful power of observation. He sees everything, he omits nothing, he writes down as in an inventory all the sights and sounds of the countryside; proving how true it is that, as he says, "the eye sees what it comes to see." These things were his pets, like the roses the lover of his garden tends so faithfully, and the fact that he could note them so carefully and lovingly day by day became his abiding reward.

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# SELECTIONS FROM RICHARD JEFFERIES.

## OUT OF DOORS IN FEBRUARY.

THE cawing of the rooks in February shows that the time is coming when their nests will be re-occupied. They resort to the trees, and perch above the old nests to indicate their rights ; for in the rookery possession is the law, and not nine-tenths of it only. In the slow dull cold of winter even these noisy birds are quiet, and as the vast flocks pass over, night and morning, to and from the woods in which they roost, there is scarcely a sound. Through the mist their black wings advance in silence, the jackdaws with them are chilled into unwonted quiet, and unless you chance to look up the crowd may go over unnoticed. But so soon as the waters begin to make a sound in February, running in the ditches and splashing over stones, the rooks commence the speeches and conversations which will continue till late into the following autumn.

The general idea is that they pair in February, but there are some reasons for thinking that the rooks, in fact, choose their mates at the end of the preceding summer. They are then in large flocks, and if only casually glanced at appear mixed together without any order or arrangement. They move on the ground and

fly in the air so close, one beside the other, that at the first glance or so you cannot distinguish them apart. Yet if you should be lingering along the by-ways of the fields as the acorns fall, and the leaves come rustling down in the warm sunny autumn afternoons, and keep an observant eye upon the rooks in the trees, or on the fresh-turned furrows, they will be seen to act in couples. On the ground couples alight near each other, on the trees they perch near each other, and in the air fly side by side. Like soldiers, each has his comrade. Wedged in the ranks, every man looks like his fellow, and there seems no tie between them but a common discipline. Intimate acquaintance with barrack or camp life would show that every one had his friend. There is also the mess, or companionship of half a dozen, a dozen, or more, and something like this exists part of the year in the armies of the rooks. After the nest time is over they flock together, and each family of three or four flies in concert. Later on they apparently choose their own particular friends, that is the young birds do so. All through the winter after, say October, these pairs keep together, though lost in the general mass to the passing spectator. If you alarm them while feeding on the ground in winter, supposing you have not got a gun, they merely rise up to the nearest tree, and it may then be observed that they do this in pairs. One perches on a branch and a second comes to him. When February arrives, and they resort to the nests to look after or seize on the property there, they are in fact already paired, though the almanacs put down St. Valentine's day as the date of courtship.

There is very often a warm interval in February, sometimes a few days earlier and sometimes later, but as a rule it happens that a week or so of mild sunny weather occurs about this time. Released from the grip of the frost, the streams trickle forth from the fields and pour

into the ditches, so that while walking along the footpath there is a murmur all around coming from the rush of water. The murmur of the poets is indeed louder in February than in the more pleasant days of summer, for then the growth of aquatic grasses checks the flow and stills it, whilst in February, every stone, or flint, or lump of chalk divides the current and causes a vibration. With this murmur of water, and mild time, the rooks caw incessantly, and the birds at large essay to utter their welcome of the sun. The wet furrows reflect the rays so that the dark earth gleams, and in the slight mist that stays farther away the light pauses and fills the vapour with radiance. Through this luminous mist the larks race after each other twittering, and as they turn aside, swerving in their swift flight, their white breasts appear for a moment. As while standing by a pool the fishes come into sight, emerging as they swim round from the shadow of the deeper water, so the larks dart over the low hedge, and through the mist, and pass before you, and are gone again. All at once one checks his pursuit, forgets the immediate object, and rises, singing as he soars. The notes fall from the air over the dark wet earth, over the dank grass, and broken withered fern of the hedges, and listening to them it seems for a moment spring. There is sunshine in the song: the lark and the light are one. He gives us a few minutes of summer in February days. In May he rises before as yet the dawn is come, and the sunrise flows down to us under through his notes. On his breast, high above the earth, the first rays fall as the rim of the sun edges up at the eastward hill. The lark and the light are as one, and wherever he glides over the wet furrows the glint of the sun goes with him. Anon alighting he runs between the lines of the green corn. In hot summer, when the open hillside is burned with bright light, the larks are then singing and soaring. Stepping up the hill

laboriously, suddenly a lark starts into the light and pours forth a rain of unwearied notes overhead. With bright light, and sunshine, and sunrise, and blue skies the bird is so associated in the mind, that even to see him in the frosty days of winter, at least assures us that summer will certainly return.

Ought not winter, in allegorical designs, the rather to be represented with such things as might suggest hope than such as convey a cold and grim despair? The withered leaf, the snowflake, the hedging bill that cuts and destroys, why these? Why not rather the dear larks for one? They fly in flocks, and amid the white expanse of snow (in the south) their pleasant twitter or call is heard as they sweep along seeking some grassy spot cleared by the wind. The lark, the bird of the light, is there in the bitter short days. Put the lark then for winter, a sign of hope, a certainty of summer. Put, too, the sheathed bud, for if you search the hedge you will find the buds there, on tree and bush, carefully wrapped around with the case which protects them as a cloak. Put, too, the sharp needles of the green corn; let the wind clear it of snow a little way, and show that under cold clod and colder snow the green thing pushes up, knowing that summer must come. Nothing despairs but man. Set the sharp curve of the white new moon in the sky: she is white in true frost, and yellow a little if it is devising change. Set the new moon as something that symbols an increase. Set the shepherd's crook in a corner as a token that the flocks are already enlarged in number. The shepherd is the symbolic man of the hardest winter time. His work is never more important than then. Those that only roam the fields when they are pleasant in May, see the lambs at play in the meadow, and naturally think of lambs and May flowers. But the lamb was born in the adversity of snow. Or you might

set the morning star, for it burns and burns and glitters in the winter dawn, and throws forth beams like those of metal consumed in oxygen. There is nought that I know by comparison with which I might indicate the glory of the morning star, while yet the dark night hides in the hollows. The lamb is born in the fold. The morning star glitters in the sky. The bud is alive in its sheath; the green corn under the snow; the lark twitters as he passes. Now these to me are the allegory of winter.

These mild hours in February check the hold which winter has been gaining, and as it were, tear his claws out of the earth, their prey. If it has not been so bitter previously, when this Gulf stream or current of warmer air enters the expanse it may bring forth a butterfly and tenderly woo the first violet into flower. But this depends on its having been only moderately cold before, and also upon the stratum, whether it is backward clay, or forward gravel and sand. Spring dates are quite different according to the locality, and when violets may be found in one district, in another there is hardly a woodbine-leaf out. The border line may be traced, and is occasionally so narrow, one may cross over it almost at a step. It would sometimes seem as if even the nut-tree bushes bore larger and finer nuts on the warmer soil, and that they ripened quicker. Any curious in the first of things, whether it be a leaf, or flower, or a bird, should bear this in mind, and not be discouraged because he hears some one else has already discovered or heard something.

A little note taken now at this bare time of the kind of earth may lead to an understanding of the district. It is plain where the plough has turned it, where the rabbits have burrowed and thrown it out, where a tree has been felled by the gales, by the brook where the bank is worn away, or by the sediment at the shallow places. Before the grass and weeds, and corn and flowers have

hidden it, the character of the soil is evident at these natural sections without the aid of a spade. Going slowly along the footpath—indeed you cannot go fast in moist February—it is a good time to select the places and map them out where herbs and flowers will most likely come first. All the autumn lies prone on the ground. Dead dark leaves, some washed to their woody frames, short grey stalks, some few decayed hulls of hedge fruit, and among these the mars or stocks of the plants that do not die away, but lie as it were on the surface waiting. Here the strong teasle will presently stand high; here the ground-ivy will dot the mound with bluish-purple. But it will be necessary to walk slowly to find the ground-ivy flowers under the cover of the briars. These bushes will be a likely place for a blackbird's nest; this thick close hawthorn for a bullfinch; these bramble thickets with remnants of old nettle stalks will be frequented by the white-throat after a while. The hedge is now but a lattice-work which will before long be hung with green. Now it can be seen through, and now is the time to arrange for future discovery. In May everything will be hidden, and unless the most promising places are selected beforehand, it will not be easy to search them out. The broad ditch will be arched over, the plants rising on the mound will meet the green boughs drooping, and all the vacancy will be filled. But having observed the spot in winter you can almost make certain of success in spring.

It is this previous knowledge which invests those who are always on the spot, those who work much in the fields or have the care of woods, with their apparent prescience. They lead the new comer to a hedge, or the corner of a copse, or a bend of the brook, announcing beforehand that they feel assured something will be found there; and so it is. This, too, is one reason why a fixed observer usually sees

more than one who rambles a great deal and covers ten times the space. The fixed observer who hardly goes a mile from home is like the man who sits still by the edge of a crowd, and by and by his lost companion returns to him. To walk about in search of persons in a crowd is well known to be the worst way of recovering them. Sit still and they will often come by. In a far more certain manner this is the case with birds and animals. They all come back. During a twelvemonth probably every creature would pass over a given locality: every creature that is not confined to certain places. The whole army of the woods and hedges marches across a single farm in twelve months. A single tree—especially an old tree—is visited by four-fifths of the birds that ever perch in the course of that period. Every year, too, brings something fresh, and adds new visitors to the list. Even the wild sea birds are found inland, and some that scarce seem able to fly at all are cast far ashore by the gales. It is difficult to believe that one would not see more by extending the journey, but, in fact, experience proves that the longer a single locality is studied the more is found in it. But you should know the places in winter as well as in tempting summer, when song and shade and colour attract every one to the field. You should face the mire and slippery path. Nature yields nothing to the sybarite. The meadow glows with buttercups in spring, the hedges are green, the woods lovely; but these are not to be enjoyed in their full significance unless you have traversed the same places when bare, and have watched the slow fulfilment of the flowers.

The moist leaves that remain upon the mounds do not rustle, and the thrush moves among them unheard. The sunshine may bring out a rabbit, feeding along the slope of the mound, following the paths or runs. He picks his way, he does not like wet. Though out at night in the

dewy grass of summer, in the rain-soaked grass of winter, and living all his life in the earth, often damp nearly to his burrows, no time, and no succession of generations can make him like wet. He endures it, but he picks his way round the dead fern and the decayed leaves. He sits in the bunches of long grass, but he does not like the drops of rain or dew on it to touch him. Water lays his fur close, and mats it, instead of running off and leaving him sleek. As he hops a little way at a time on the mound he chooses his route almost as we pick ours in the mud and pools of February. By the shore of the ditch there still stand a few dry, dead dock stems, with some dry reddish-brown seed adhering. Some dry brown nettle stalks remain; some grey and broken thistles; some teasles leaning on the bushes. The power of winter has reached its utmost now, and can go no farther. These vines which still hang in the bushes are those of the greater bindweed, and will be used in a month or so by many birds as conveniently curved to fit about their nests. The stem of wild clematis, grey and bowed, could scarcely look more dead. Fibres are peeling from it, they come off at the touch of the fingers. The few brown feathers that perhaps still adhere where the flowers once were are stained and discoloured by the beating of the rain. It is not dead: it will flourish again ere long. It is the sturdiest of creepers, facing the ferocious winds of the hills, the tremendous rains that blow up from the sea, and bitter frost, if only it can get its roots into soil that suits it. In some places it takes the place of the hedge proper and becomes itself the hedge. Many of the trunks of the elms are swathed in minute green vegetation which has flourished in the winter, as the clematis will in the summer. Of all, the brambles bear the wild works of winter best. Given only a little shelter, in the corner of the hedges or under trees and copses they retain green



leaves till the buds burst again. The frosts tint them in autumn with crimson, but not all turn colour or fall. The brambles are the bowers of the birds; in these still leafy bowers they do the courting of the spring, and under the brambles the earliest arum, and cleaver, or avens, push up. Round about them the first white nettle flowers, not long now; latest too, in the autumn. The white nettle sometimes blooms so soon (always according to locality), and again so late, that there seems but a brief interval between, as if it flowered nearly all the year round. So the berries on the holly if let alone often stay till summer is in, and new berries begin to appear shortly afterwards. The ivy, too, bears its berries far into the summer. Perhaps if the country be taken at large there is never a time when there is not a flower of some kind out, in this or that warm southern nook. The sun never sets, nor do the flowers ever die. There is life always, even in the dry fir-cone that looks so brown and sapless.

The path crosses the uplands where the lapwings stand on the parallel ridges of the ploughed field like a drilled company; if they rise they wheel as one, and in the twilight move across the fields in bands, invisible as they sweep near the ground, but seen against the sky in rising over the trees and the hedges. There is a plantation of fir and ash on the slope, and a narrow waggon way enters it, and seems to lose itself in the wood. Always approach this spot quietly, for whatever is in the wood is sure at some time or other to come to the open space of the track. Wood-pigeons, pheasants, squirrels, magpies, hares, everything feathered or furred, down to the mole, is sure to seek the open way. Butterflies flutter through the copse by it in summer, just as you or I might use the passage between the trees. Towards the evening the partridges may run through to join their friends before roost time on the ground. Or you may see a covey there

now and then, creeping slowly with humped backs, and at a distance not unlike hedgehogs in their motions. The spot therefore should be approached with care; if it is only a thrush out it is a pleasure to see him at his ease and, as he deems, unobserved. If a bird or animal thinks itself noticed it seldom does much, some will cease singing immediately they are looked at. The day is perceptibly longer already. As the sun goes down, the western sky often takes a lovely green tint in this month, and one stays to look at it, forgetting the dark and miry way homewards. I think the moments when we forget the mire of the world are the most precious. After a while the green corn rises higher out of the rude earth.

Pure colour almost always gives the idea of fire; or rather it is perhaps as if a light shone through as well as colour itself. The fresh green blade of corn is like this, so pellucid, so clear and pure in its green as to seem to shine with colour. It is not brilliant—not a surface gleam or an enamel,—it is stained through. Beside the moist clods the slender flags arise filled with the sweetness of the earth. Out of the darkness under—that darkness which knows no day save when the ploughshare opens its chinks—they have come to the light. To the light they have brought a colour which will attract the sunbeams from now till harvest. They fall more pleasantly on the corn, toned, as if they mingled with it. Seldom do we realize that the world is practically no thicker to us than the print of our footsteps on the path. Upon that surface we walk, and act our comedy of life, and what itself the hedge. We are swathed in minute flowers, and the unknown, from the summer. Of all, the brambles green blades have sprung. winter best. Given only a little up the hill, groaning with of the hedges or under trees and strength and might of cannot drag from the earth.

one single blade like these. Force cannot make it; it must grow—an easy word to speak or write, in fact full of potency. It is this mystery of growth and life, of beauty, and sweetness, and colour, starting forth from the clods that gives the corn its power over me.

There is sunshine to-day after rain, and every lark is singing. Across the vale a broad cloud-shadow descends the hillside, is lost in the hollow, and presently, without warning, slips over the edge, coming swiftly along the green tips. The sunshine follows—the warmer for its momentary absence. Far, far down in a grassy coomb stands a solitary cornick, conical roofed, casting a lonely shadow—marked because so solitary, and beyond it on the rising slope is a brown copse. The leafless branches take a brown tint in the sunlight; on the summit above there is furze; then more hill lines drawn against the sky. In the tops of the dark pines at the corner of the copse, could the glance sustain itself to see them, there are finches warming themselves in the sunbeams. The thick needles shelter them from the current of air, and the sky is bluer above the pines. Their hearts are full already of the happy days to come, when the moss yonder by the beech, and the lichen on the fir-trunk, and the loose fibres caught in the fork of an unbending bough, shall furnish forth a sufficient mansion for their young. Another broad cloud-shadow, and another warm embrace of sunlight. All the serried ranks of the green corn bow at the word of command as the wind rushes over them.

The wind passes, and it bends—let the wind, too, pass over the spirit. From the cloud-shadow it emerges to the sunshine—let the heart come out from the shadow of roofs to the open glow of the sky. High above, the songs of the larks fall as rain—receive it with open hands. Pure is the colour of the green flags, the slender-pointed blades—let the thought be pure as the light that shines through

that colour. Broad are the downs and open the aspect—gather the breadth and largeness of view. Never can that view be wide enough and large enough, there will always be room to aim higher. As the air of the hills enriches the blood, so let the presence of these beautiful things enrich the inner sense. One memory of the green corn, fresh beneath the sun and wind, will lift up the heart from the clods.

## HOURS OF SPRING.

It is sweet on awaking in the early morn to listen to the small bird singing on the tree. No sound of voice or flute is like to the bird's song; there is something in it distinct and separate from all other notes. The throat of woman gives forth a more perfect music, and the organ is the glory of man's soul. The bird upon the tree utters the meaning of the wind—a voice of the grass and wild flower, words of the green leaf; they speak through that slender tone. Sweetness of dew and rifts of sunshine, the dark hawthorn touched with breadths of open bud, the odour of the air, the colour of the daffodil—all that is delicious and beloved of spring time are expressed in his song. Genius is nature, and his lay, like the sap in the bough from which he sings, rises without thought. Nor is it necessary that it should be a song; a few short notes in the sharp spring morning are sufficient to stir the heart. But yesterday the least of them all came to a bough by my window, and in his call I heard the sweet-brier wind rushing over the young grass. Refulgent fall the golden rays of the sun; a minute only, the clouds cover him and the hedge is dark. The bloom of the

gorse is shut like a book; but it is there—a few hours of warmth and the covers will fall open. The meadow is bare, but in a little while the heart-shaped celandine leaves will come in their accustomed place. On the pollard willows the long wands are yellow-ruddy in the passing gleam of sunshine, the first colour of spring appears in their bark. The delicious wind rushes among them and they bow and rise; it touches the top of the dark pine that looks in the sun the same now as in summer; it lifts and swings the arching trail of bramble; it dries and crumbles the earth in its fingers; the hedge-sparrow's feathers are fluttered as he sings on the bush.

I wonder to myself how they can all get on without me—how they manage, bird and flower, without me to keep the calendar for them. For I noted it so carefully and lovingly, day by day, the seed-leaves on the mounds in the sheltered places that come so early, the pushing up of the young grass, the succulent dandelion, the colts-foot on the heavy thick clods, the trodden chickweed despised at the foot of the gate-post, so common and small, and yet so dear to me. Every blade of grass was mine, as though I had planted it separately. They were all my pets, as the roses the lover of his garden tends so faithfully. All the grasses of the meadow were my pets, I loved them all; and perhaps that was why I never had a "pet," never cultivated a flower, never kept a caged bird, or any creature. Why keep pets when every wild free hawk that passed overhead in the air was mine? I joyed in his swift, careless flight, in the throw of his pinions, in his rush over the elms and miles of woodland; it was happiness to see his unchecked life. What more beautiful than the sweep and curve of his going through the azure sky? These were my pets, and all the grass. Under the wind it seemed to dry and become grey, and the starlings running to and fro on the

surface that did not sink now stood high above it and were larger. The dust that drifted along blessed it and it grew. Day by day a change; always a note to make. The moss drying on the tree trunks, dog's-mercury stirring under the ash-poles, bird's-claw buds of beech lengthening, books upon books to be filled with these things. I cannot think how they manage without me.

To-day through the window-pane I see a lark high up against the grey cloud, and hear his song. I cannot walk about and arrange with the buds and gorse-bloom; how does he know it is the time for him to sing? Without my book and pencil and observing eye, how does he understand that the hour has come? To sing high in the air, to chase his mate over the low stone wall of the ploughed field, to battle with his high-crested rival, to balance himself on his trembling wings outspread a few yards above the earth, and utter that sweet little loving kiss, as it were, of song—oh, happy, happy days! So beautiful to watch as if he were my own, and I felt it all! It is years since I went out amongst them in the old fields, and saw them in the green corn; they must be dead, dear little things, by now. Without me to tell him, how does this lark to-day that I hear through the window know it is his hour?

The green hawthorn buds prophesy on the hedge; the reed pushes up in the moist earth like a spear thrust through a shield; the eggs of the starling are laid in the knot-hole of the pollard elm—common eggs, but within each a speck that is not to be found in the cut diamond of two hundred carats—the dot of protoplasm, the atom of life. There was one row of pollards where they always began laying first. With a big stick in his beak the rook is blown aside like a loose feather in the wind; he knows his building-time from the fathers of his house—hereditary knowledge handed down in settled course: but the

stray things of the hedge, how do they know? The great blackbird has planted his nest by the ash-stole, open to every one's view, without a bough to conceal it and not a leaf on the ash--nothing but the moss on the lower end of the branches. He does not seek cunningly for concealment. I think of the drift of time, and I see the apple bloom coming and the blue veronica in the grass. A thousand thousand buds and leaves and flowers and blades of grass, things to note day by day, increasing so rapidly that no pencil can put them down and no book hold them, not even to number them--and how to write the thoughts they give? All these without me--how can they manage without me?

I thought myself so much to the earliest leaf and the first meadow orchis--so important that I should note the first zee-zee of the titlark--that I should pronounce it summer, because now the oaks were green; I must not miss a day nor an hour in the fields lest something should escape me. How beautiful the droop of the great brome-grass by the wood! But to-day I have to listen to the lark's song--not out of doors with him, but through the window-pane, and the bullfinch carries the rootlet fibre to his nest without me. They manage without me very well; they know their times and seasons--not only the civilized rooks, with their libraries of knowledge in their old nests of reference, but the stray things of the hedge and the chiffchaff from over sea in the ash wood. They go on without me. Orchis flower and cowslip--I cannot number them all--I hear, as it were, the patter of their feet--flower and bud and the beautiful clouds that go over, with the sweet rush of rain and burst of sun glory among the leafy trees. They go on, and I am no more than the least of the empty shells that strewed the sward of the hill. Nature sets no value upon life, neither of mine nor of the larks that sang years ago.

The earth is all in all to me, but I am nothing to the earth: it is better to know this before you are dead. These delicious violets are sweet for themselves; they were not shaped and coloured and gifted with that exquisite proportion and adjustment of odour and hue for me. High up against the grey cloud I hear the lark through the window singing, and each note falls into my heart like a knife.

The larks sang at first high up against the grey cloud over the frost-bound earth. They could not wait longer; love was strong in their little hearts—stronger than the winter. After a while the hedge-sparrows, too, began to sing on the top of the gorse-hedge about the garden. By and by a chaffinch boldly raised his voice, ending with the old story, "Sweet, will you, will you kiss—me—dear?" Then there came a hoar-frost, and the earth, which had been black, became white, as its evaporated vapours began to gather and drops of rain to fall. Even then the obstinate weather refused quite to yield, wrapping its cloak, as it were, around it in bitter enmity. But in a day or two white clouds lit up with sunshine appeared drifting over from the southward, and that was the end. Five dull yellow spots on the hedge—gorse bloom—that had remained unchanged for so many weeks, took a fresh colour and became golden. By the constant passing of the waggons and carts along the road that had been so silent it was evident that the busy time of spring was here. There would be rough weather, doubtless, now and again, but it would not again be winter.

Dark patches of cloud—spots of ink on the sky, the "messengers"—go drifting by; and after them will follow the water-carriers, harnessed to the south and west winds, drilling the long rows of rain like seed into the earth. After a time there will be a rainbow. Through the bars of my prison I can see the catkins thick and fallow-grey



on the willows across the field, visible even at that distance; so great the change in a few days, the hand of spring grows firm and takes a strong grasp of the hedges.

How happy the trees must be to hear the song of birds again in their branches! After the silence and the leaflessness, to have the birds back once more and to feel them busy at the nest building; how glad to give them the moss and fibres and the crutch of the boughs to build in! Pleasant it is now to watch the sunlit clouds sailing onwards; it is like sitting by the sea. There is voyaging to and fro of birds; the strong wood pigeon goes over—a long course in the air, from hill to distant copse; a black-bird starts from an ash, and, now inclining this way and now that, traverses the meadows to the thick corner hedge; finches go by, and the air is full of larks that sing without ceasing. The touch of the wind, the moisture of the dew, the sun-stained raindrop, have in them the magic force of life—a marvellous something that was not there before. Under it the narrow blade of grass comes up freshly green between the old white fibres the rook pulled; the sycamore bud swells and opens, and takes the eye instantly in the still dark wood; the starlings go to the hollow pollards; the lambs leap in the mead. You never know what a day may bring forth—what new thing will come next. Yesterday I saw the ploughman and his team, and the earth gleamed smooth behind the share; to-day a butterfly has gone past; the farm folk are bringing home the fagots from the hedgerows: to-morrow there will be a merry, merry note in the ash copse, the chiffchaffs' ringing call to arms, to arms, ye leaves! By and by a bennet, a bloom of the grass; in time to come the furrow, as it were, shall open, and the great buttercup of the waters will show a broad palm of gold. You never know what will come to the net of the eye next—a bud, a flower, a nest, a curled fern, or whether it will be in the

buttercups, lesser celandine, daisies, white blackthorn, and gorse in bloom—in short, a list enough to make a page bright with colour, though the wind might be bitter. In the coldest and most exposed place I ever lived in, and with a spring as cold as this, the May garlands included orchids, and the meadows were perfectly golden with marsh-marigolds. For some reason or other the flowers seem to come as near as they can to their time, let the weather be as hard as it may. They are more regular than the migrant birds, and much more so than the trees. The elm, oak, and ash appear to wait a great deal on the sun and the atmosphere, and their boughs give much better indications of what the weather has really been than birds and flowers. The migrant birds try their hardest to keep time, and some of them arrive a week or more before they are noticed. Elm, oak, and ash are the surest indicators; the horse-chestnut is very apt to put forth its broad succulent leaves too soon; the sycamore, too, is an early tree in spite of everything. It has been said that of late years we have not had any settled, soft, warm weather till after midsummer. There has been a steady continual cold draught from the northward till the sun reached the solstice, so that the summers, in fact, have not commenced till the end of June. There is a good deal of general truth in this observation; certainly we seem to have lost our springs. I do not think I have heard it thunder this year up to the time of writing. The absence of electrical disturbance shows a peculiar state of atmosphere unfavourable to growth, so that the corn will not hide a partridge, and in some places hardly a sparrow. Where did the painters get their green leaves from this year in time for the galleries? Not from the trees, for they had none.

A flock of rooks was waddling about in a thinly grown field of corn which scarcely hid their feet, and a number

of swallows, flying very low, scarcely higher than the rooks' breasts, wound in and out among them. The day was cloudy and cold, and probably the insects had settled on the ground. The rooks' feet stirred them up, and as they rose they were taken by the swallows. All over the field there were no other swallows, nor in the adjacent fields, only in that one spot where the rooks were feeding. On another occasion swallows flying low over a closely cropped grass field alighted on the sward to try and catch their prey. There seems a scarcity of some kinds of insect life, due doubtless to the wind. Out of a dozen butterfly chrysalids collected, six were worthless; they were stiff, and when opened were stuffed full of small white larvæ, which had eaten away the coming butterfly in its shell. They were the offspring of a parasite insect, which thus provided for the sustenance of its young by eating up other young, after the cruel way of nature. Why does one robin carefully choose a thatched eave for its nest, out of reach except by a ladder, and safe from all beasts of prey, and another place its nest on a low grassy bank scarcely hidden by a plant of wild parsley, and easily taken by the smallest boy? At first it looks like a great difference in intelligence, but probably each bird acted as well as could be under the circumstances. Each robin has to fight for his locality, and he has to make the best of his territory; if he trespassed on another bird's premises he would be driven away. You must build your house where you happen to possess a plot of land. It is curious to see the male bird feeding the female, not only while on the nest, but when she comes away from it; the female perches on a branch and utters a little call, and the male brings her food. He was feeding her the other evening on the bare boughs of a fig tree some distance from the nest. The warmth of the sun, although we could not feel it, must have penetrated into the earth some time

woodland or by the meadow path, at the water's side or on the dead dry heap of fagots. There is no settled succession, no fixed and formal order--always the unexpected, and you cannot say, "I will go and find this or that." The sowing of life in the spring time is not in the set straight line of the drill, nor shall you find wild flowers by a foot measure. There are great woods without a hly of the valley; the nightingale does not sing everywhere. Nature has no arrangement, no plan, nothing judicious even; the walnut trees bring forth their tender buds, and the frost burns them--they have no mosaic of time to fit in, like a Roman tessellated pavement; Nature is like a child, who will sing and shout though you may be never so deeply pondering in the study, and does not wait for the hour that suits your mind. You do not know what you may find each day; perhaps you may only pick up a fallen feather, but it is beautiful, every filament. Always beautiful! everything beautiful! And are these things new--the ploughman and his team, the lark's song, the green leaf? Can they be new? Surely they have been of old time! They are, indeed, new--the only things that are so; the rest is old and grey, and a weariness.

## MIXED DAYS OF MAY AND DECEMBER.

IN a sheltered spot the cuckoo was first heard on April 29, but only for one day; then, as the wind took up its accustomed northerly drift again, he was silent. The first chimney swallows (four) appeared on April 25, and were quickly followed by a number. They might be

## MIXED DAYS OF MAY AND DECEMBER 19

said to be about three weeks behind time, and the cuckoo a fortnight. The chiffchaff uttered his clear yet rather sad notes on April 26. The same morning at five o'clock there had been a slight snow shower, but it was a sunny day. On May 1 a stitchwort was in flower, a plant that marks the period distinctly. A swift appeared on May 2; I should not consider this late. A whitethroat was catching insects in the garden on May 6. The cuckoo sang again on May 8; the same day a red admiral butterfly was seen, and the turtle dove heard cooing. Next day, the 9th, the cave swallow appeared, and also the bank martin. With the cooing of the turtle dove the spring migrants are generally complete; a warm summer bird, he is usually the last, and if the others have not been seen they are probably in the country somewhere. The chimney swallows had been absent five months all but five days (last seen November 30), so that reckoning the first and the last, they may be said to stay in England seven months—much longer than one would think without taking the dates. Up till April 20 the hedges seemed as bare as they were in January, a most dreary spectacle of barren branches, and the great elms gaunt against the sky. After that the hedges gradually filled with leaf, and were fully coloured when the turtle dove began to sing, but still the elms were only just budding, and but faintly tinted with green.

Chaucer was right in singing of the "floures" of May notwithstanding the northern winds and early frosts and December-like character of our Mays. That the cycle of weather was warmer in his time is probably true, but still even now, under all the drawbacks of a late and wintry season, his description is perfectly accurate. If any one had gone round the fields on old May-day, the 13th, his May-day, they might have found the deep blue bird's-eye veronica, anemones, star-like stitchworts, cowslips,

since, for a slowworm came forth on a mound for the first time on April 16. He coiled up on the eastern side every morning for some hours, but was never seen in the afternoon. His short, thick body and unfinished tail, more like a punch or the neck of a stumpy bottle, was turned in a loop, the head nearly touching the tail, like a pair of sugar-tongs. Coming out from the stitchwort and grasses, the spiders often ran over his shining dark brown surface, something the colour of glazed earthenware. A snake or an adder would have begun to move away the moment any one stopped to look at it; but the slowworm takes no notice, and hence it is often said to be blind. He seems to dislike any sharp noise, and is really fully aware of your presence. Close by the mound, which stands in a corner of the garden, there is a great bunch of blue comfrey, to which the bees and humble bees come in such numbers as to seem to justify the idea that these insects prefer blue. Or perhaps the blue flowers secrete sweeter honey. Every kind of wild bee as yet flying visits this plant, tiny bees barely a quarter of an inch long, others as big as two filberts, some a deep amber, some striped like wasps. A little of Chaucer's May has come; now and then a short hour or two of sunshine between the finger and thumb of the north wind. Most pleasant it is to see the eave swallow dive down from the roof and rush over the scarcely green garden—a household sign of summer. In the lane if you gather them the young leaves of the sycamore have a fragrant scent like a flower, and low down ferns are unrolling. On the low wall sits a yellow-hammer just brightly touched afresh with colour. Happy greenfinches go by, and it is curious to note how the instant they enter the hedge they are lost now under the leaves; so few days ago they would have been unconcealed. So near is it to summer that the first thrush begins to sing at three o'clock in the morning.

## SWALLOW TIME.

THE eave swallows have come at last with the midsummer time, and the hay and white clover and warm winds that breathe hotly, like one that has been running uphill. With the paler hawkweeds, whose edges are so delicately trimmed and cut and balanced, almost as if made by deft human fingers to human design, whose globes of down are like geometrical circles built up of facets, instead of by one revolution of the compasses. With foxglove and dragon-fly and yellowing wheat; with green cones of fir, and boom of distant thunder, and all things that say, "It is summer." Not many of them even now, sometimes only two in the air together, sometimes three or four, and one day eight, the very greatest number—a mere handful, for these eave swallows at such times should crowd the sky. The white bars across their backs should be seen gliding beside the dark fir copse a quarter of a mile away. They should be seen everywhere, over the house, and to and fro the eaves, where half last year's nest remains; over the meadows and high up in the blue ether. White breasts should gleam in the azure height, appearing and disappearing as they climb or sink, and wheel and slide through those long boomerang-like flights that suddenly take them a hundred yards aside. They should crowd the sky together with the ruddy-throated chimney swallows, and the great swifts; but though it is hay time and the apples are set, yet eight eave swallows is the largest number I have counted in one afternoon. They did not come at all in the spring. After the heavy winter cleared away, the delicate willow-wrens soon sang in the tops of the beautiful green larches, the nightingale came, and the cuckoo, the chimney swallow, the doves softly cooing as

the oaks came into leaf, and the black swifts. Up to May 26 there were no eave swallows at the Sussex hill-side where these notes were taken; that is more than a month later than the date of their usual arrival, which would be about the middle of April. After this they gradually came back. The chimney swallows were not so late, but even they are not so numerous as usual. The swifts seem to have come more in their accustomed numbers. Now, the swallows are, of all others, the summer birds. As well suppose the trees without leaves as the summer air without swallows. Ever since of old time the Greeks went round from house to house in spring singing the swallow song, these birds have been looked upon as the friends of man, and almost as the very bringers of the sunshine.

The swallow's come, winging  
His way to us here;  
Fair hours is he bringing,  
And a happy new year!

They had a song for everything, the mill song, the reaper's song, just as in Somerset, the apple country, they still have a cider song, or perhaps, rather, an orchard song. Such rhymes might well be chanted about the hay and the wheat, or at the coming of the green leaf, or the yellowing of the acorns, when the cawing of the rooks is incessant, a kind of autumn festival. It seems so natural that the events of the year should be met with a song. But somehow a very hard and unobservant spirit has got abroad into our rural life, and people do not note things as the old folk did. They do not mark the coming of the swallows, nor any of the dates that make the woodland almanack. It is a pity that there should be such indifference—that the harsh ways of the modern town should press so heavily on the country. This summer, too, there seems a marked absence of bees, butterflies, and



my part would have stopped him. Almost before I could lift my head he had reached the end of the lane and rose over the gate into the road—not a moment's pause before he made that leap over the gate to see if there was a waggon or not in the way; a waggon-load of hay would have blocked the road entirely. How did he know that a man or a horse would not step into his course at the instant he topped the bar?

A swallow never hesitates, never looks before he leaps, threads all day the eyes of needles, and goes on from half-past two in the morning till ten at night, without so much as disturbing a feather. He is the perfection of a machine for falling. His round nest is under the eaves, he throws himself out of window and begins to fall, and keeps on fall, fall, for twenty hours together. His head is bullet-shaped, his neck short, his body all thickened up to the shoulders, tailing out to the merest streak of a feather. His form is like a plummet—he is not unlike the heavily weighted minnow used in trolling for pike. Before the bend of the firmly elastic rod, the leaded minnow slides out through the air, running true and sinking without splash into the water. It is proportioned and weighted so that its flight, which is a long fall, may be smooth, and perfectly under control. If wings could be put to the minnow, it would somewhat resemble the swallow. For the swallow is made to fall, and his wings to catch him, and by resisting his descent these outstretched planes lift him again into the sky. He does not fall perpendicularly, the angle of his fall is prolonged and very low, and the swifter he goes the more nearly it approximates to the horizontal. I think he goes swifter when flying just over the ground than when lounging in the easy hammock of the atmosphere. My swallow that came down the lane, in twenty yards opened his wings twenty times and checked his fall, almost grazing the earth, and imperceptibly

for a week together without a spot of rain falling. Chilly air drives insects downwards, and, indeed, paralyzes a great many of them altogether. It is a fall of temperature, and not wet, that makes the swallows chase their prey low down. Insects are not much afraid of rain if it is warm and soft, so that in the midst of showers, if there is sunshine too, you may see the swallows high in the atmosphere. It is when they fly low, but just missing the grass, that their wonderful powers of flight appear. In the air above there are no obstacles, and if you shoot an arrow it travels to the end of its journey without let or hindrance; there are no streets there to turn corners, no narrow lanes, no trees or hedges. When the swallow comes down to the earth his path is no longer that of the immortals, his way is as the way of men, constantly obstructed, and made a thousandfold more difficult by the velocity of his passage. Imagine shooting an arrow from the strongest bow in such a manner that it might travel about seven inches above the ground—how far would it go before it would strike a tall buttercup, a wiry bennet, or stick into a slight rise of the turf? You must imagine it given the power to rise over hedges, to make short angles about buildings, slip between the trunks of trees, to avoid moving objects, as men or animals, not to come in contact with other animated arrows, and by some mysterious instinct to know what is or what is not out of sight on the other side of the wall. I was sitting on a log in the narrowest of narrow lanes, a hedge at the back, in front thick fir trees, whose boughs touched the ground, almost within reach, the lane being nothing more than a broader footpath. It was one of those overcast days when the shelter of the hedge and the furze was pleasant in July. Suddenly a swallow slid by me as it seemed underneath my very hands, so close to the ground that he almost travelled in the rut, the least movement on

course is not followed for pleasure as if it were a mazy dance. The whole time as he floats, and glides, and wheels, his eye is intent on insects so small as to be invisible to us at a very short distance. These he gathers in the air, he sees what we cannot see, his eyes are to our eyes as his wings are to our limbs. If still further we were to consider the flow of the nerve force between the eye, the mind, and the wing, we should be face to face with problems which quite upset the ordinary ideas of matter as a solid thing. How is it that dull matter becomes thus inexpressibly sensitive? Is not the swallow's eye a miracle? Then his heart, for he sings as he flies; he makes love and converses, and all as he rushes along—his hopes, his fears, his little store of knowledge, and his wonderful journey by and by to Africa. Remember, he carries his life in his wings as we should say in our hands, for if by chance he should strike a solid object, his great speed renders the collision certain death. It stuns him, and if he recovers from that his beak is usually broken so that he must starve. Happily such accidents are rare. The great rapidity of a bird's heart beating so fast seems to render it peculiarly susceptible to death from shock. Great fright will sometimes kill a bird, as, for instance, when they have wandered inside a room, and been thoughtlessly held in some one's hand. Without visible injury, the heart, after beating excessively violently, almost as rapidly slows, the nictitating membrane is drawn over the eyes, the head falls to one side, and the bird becomes lifeless from nervous exhaustion. The beautiful swallows, be tender to them, for they symbol all that is best in nature and all that is best in our hearts.

rose a little, like a flat stone thrown by a boy which suddenly runs up into the air at the end of its flight. He made no blow with his wings; they were simply put out to collect the air in the hollow of their curves, and so prolong his fall. Falling from morn till night, he throws himself on his way, a machine for turning gravity into a motive force. He fits to the circumstances of his flight as water fits to the circumstances of the vessel into which it is poured. No thought, no stop, no rest. If a waggon had been in the way, still he would have got left or right through the very eye of the needle. If a man had been passing, the rush of his wings would not have disturbed the light smoke from his cigar. Farther up the lane there are two gateways opposite without gates. Through these swallows are continually dashing, and I have often felt when coming up the lane as if I must step on them, and half checked myself.

I might as well try to step on lightning. A swallow came over the sharp ridge of a slate roof and met a slight current of wind which blew against that side of the shed and rose up it. The bird remained there suspended with outstretched wings, resting on the up-current as if the air had been solid, for some moments. He rode there at anchor in the air. So buoyant is the swallow that it is no more to him to fly than it is to the fish to swim; and, indeed, I think that a trout in a swift mountain stream needs much greater strength to hold himself in the rapid day and night without rest. The friction of the water is constant against him, and he never folds his fins and sleeps. The more I think the more I am convinced that the buoyancy of the air is very far greater than science admits, and under certain conditions it is superior to water as a supporting medium. Swift and mobile as is the swallow's wing, how much swifter and how much more mobile must be his eye! This rapid and ever-changing

At a distance the enclosed fields seem surrounded with hedges, not merely cropped, but smoothed and polished, so rounded and regular do they appear. It is the natural tendency of beech to grow to a regular level, so that looking down upon it it appears cropped. I suppose the square shape of most of the fields is caused by the walls; walls are more easily built in straight lines than in curves. You see a spur of green hill—always much lower than the moors—surrounded at the summit by a square hedge (on a wall) like a square camp or fortification. This greater square is divided within into lesser squares. Without, fields, more or less square, descend the slope to the bottom of the valley, and each hedge, as just observed, is smooth, round, and of a polished green.

The road has the solid rock for foundation; the rock sometimes comes to the surface, so that there is no dust or crumbled stone, and wheels run on the original hard ground. Approaching the summit the fields inside the beech hedge lose the green of those lower down, the grass is not so long and fresh, and is strewn with rushes. Presently there is heather instead of sward, and the moor is on either hand. The road goes on over the hill, always between beech hedges; but I left it here, and walked out among the cotton-grass of the moor.

June had come in hot and dry, so that the dark, peaty earth was firm, and comparatively easy to walk on. Even now there were places where water stood, and I crossed by stepping on thick tufts of matted grass, dark water spirting aside under the pressure. Where the turf had been cut away there were ponds which it was necessary to go round. Pale, short grass, the blades far apart, and not close like the luxuriant growth of a meadow, interspersed, too, with much that was grey and dead, covered the broad moor, which had been burnt in the spring. My foot often caught in the dead stems of furze

## WILD EXMOOR.

THE long ascent, two miles of uphill road, to the level of the moors, passes through enclosed ground, where the deep valley shelters the place from the winds of winter. Thick hedges of beech run on either side of the road in full June leaf, shutting out all view and preventing the air from moderating the heat. There is no current between these hedges, which are not far apart, as the road is narrow, and the sense of heat is further increased by the slightly red tint of the dust. The hedges are ten feet high, and as much through, and beech grows close with well-leaved sprays, so that although the ascent is continuous, increasing elevation does not bring coolness. This impenetrability is of advantage to the cattle, sheltering them from storms and breaking the force of the tremendous gales which blow over Red Deer Land.

All the hedges beside the roads and about the fields are beech, for hawthorn will not grow to any height; the soil or the climate does not suit it, and it always remains thin and stunted. Beech springs up quickly and makes a very beautiful hedge to look at, especially in spring, when the leaf is in its first fresh green. These hedges grow above walls of loose stone, earth is banked against the wall, and the beech flourishes upon it. Long grass and moss droop over the stones of the walls like arras, and are hollow beneath; in these hollow spaces humble bees have their nests. Ferns are almost as thick as the grass, and sometimes where the walls are exposed and without the arras of moss, hart's-tongue springs from every crevice. Foxgloves flower by the gateways, and from every gateway there is a pleasant view of the green valleys beneath, and of the dark moors above.

dead furze stems, bleached by the weather, crack if stepped on. I wonder how far I have walked; the undulation whence I started has long disappeared behind another, and there is a third in front. I have crossed several boggy places, and passed many turf-ponds, and through acres of cotton-grass, waving like little white flags in the wind, and that is all; no hedges, no trees, no bushes even, to mark progress by, not so much as a tall fern.

The low boom of thunder comes again out of the infinity of space, reminding me of the profundity around, but I will not look—I will not let my glance travel farther than what I judge must be half a mile or so ahead. By an effort I check it there, and will not look farther. I make an enclosure about me to shut out the vastness. In the shadowless open the sun's heat overpowers the wind, and renders movement laborious over the uneven ground. At last there is a hollow; it is the top, the shallow upper end of a coombe, which deepens as it descends into a valley. A spring rises here, and by it there are a few short firs and bushes, quite out of sight from the level of the moor; for there are trees in the hollows, but the glance of necessity passes high over them. Beyond the spring is a wall; neither deer nor ponies heed it in the least, and even the sheep can climb most of the walls. Within the wall I enter on the heather, rising nearly to the knee, and tiring to walk through, unless you follow paths or select places less thickly covered.

The tips of the heather are fresh and green, but the stems are dry and arid-looking; they are wiry, hard, and unyielding. Another distance, I do not know how far, of dry dark heather continually fraying against my knees, is traversed, when in front appears a coombe, overgrown with heather from summit to foot, and I stop suddenly.

On the opposite slope are five hinds lying down, their heads visible above the heather, but too far for a good view. To stalk them it is necessary to go round the head, or shallow upper end of the coombe (a mile is nothing), and so get the wind to blow from them. Their scent is so quick that to approach down the wind is useless; they would scent me and be up and away long before I could get near. The hollow of the coombe carries the wind somewhat aslant just there from its general direction like a tube, else I think they would have scented me as it is.

As I start to go round the head of the coombe, suddenly some one whistles loudly, evidently as a signal to a friend, two loud notes; it is very annoying. The hinds will be off, alarmed; I am surprised that they remain quiet; another whistle, and a bird, like a large peewit, but with pointed wings, crosses the coombe, rolling from side to side as it flies. It is a curlew—his whistle exactly resembled that of a man, but the deer were not deceived. On the moors curlew is locally pronounced almost without a vowel between the *c* and the *r*, and the *lew* as *loo*—*cr-loo*, the accent being on the last syllable. After a long detour, out of sight of the deer, I approached the coombe again from the opposite side, and found them presently. They had risen, and were feeding up the coombe, rather above me: I could see them cropping the green tips of the heather. They were rather of a brown than a red colour, their necks straight, and by the tail almost white. They fed in single file, and the wind coming from them, I crept up still nearer, almost within gunshot, till the leading hind, turning to pick at one side, saw me.

She viewed me intently a moment, and then jerked her head up, at which signal the other four lifted their heads with the same quick jerk and looked at me. The leader lifted her head still higher, her ears at a sharp angle,



and in another moment went off at a good pace, followed by the rest. Hardly had they started, than three more hinds appeared—they had been feeding lower in the coombe out of sight, and raced after the five. So soon as they felt safe, having got over a few hundred yards, the whole eight paused in a group and watched me. After a moment or two they trotted again, again stopped and gazed at me; and then taking no further notice, as I showed no sign of pursuit, they began to graze, and so moved slowly on over the hill.

By the edge of the coombe I found their path; it was well trodden, and evidently much used; the heather was all bent down one way, leaning over downhill, but the dry stems and the hard ground had taken no impression or slot. In the dry heather the heat of the sun seemed greater than where the surface had been burnt, and walking was slow and difficult. But in a short time another coombe opened—the upper shallow end of a valley—and on the opposite side I saw a stag. He was lying down, but immediately got up, and looked straight across at me. His horns, in velvet, were not so high as his ears, but his coat was in perfect condition, a beautiful red gold colour, and he was a runnable deer, that is, of age and size sufficient for the chase. After a glance at me he turned, showing the whiter colour of his tail, and went quickly over the rising ground.

As he started, a second male deer jumped up from the heather, and followed him. This was younger and smaller, and not nearly so red—not much brighter in coat than a hind. A runnable stag generally has a companion like this with him. They were over the hill quickly, and I followed; they had, however, disappeared when I reached the place. A curlew whistled again, and suddenly three heath-poults sprang up and flew hurriedly away. Heath-poults, the female of blackgame,

fly like a great partizan; they seem to have the same curved wings which appear in bent-shaped as they go. These heavy birds are as large as plovers; the hen, or heath-poult, is in general terms brown, but it is a brown with buff under, crossed in squares, or checks, a pattern very difficult to imitate.

Next I came to a coombe-head in which ran a streamlet, and at its sides were some small larches in their first green, pleasant to see among the dry dark heather. At this clear spring the deer often drink, and the cover—it is hardly a cover, for there are only a few trees—is a favourite spot with them to pass the day. There was no stag here in harbour at present; still, I stayed awhile by the splashing rivulet of water under the green larches between the rocky sides of the coombe. Out in the expanse of heather the open distances were oppressive; here in the hollow, with green to enclose the eye-glance, the solitude was a delight. The deer had been here quite recently, for there was fresh slot, or foot-marks, both of stags and hinds, on a sandy path they used. All the coombes, the tops or beginnings of which I had passed, gradually deepen as the groove descends as the hill, till at the bottom they open upon a wide valley, at right angles, in which flows the Badgeworthy Water. Each of these rivulets goes to increase its stream, in which full many a noble stag has come to bay.

Over the valley rises a hill of red rock thinly grown with oak—Badgeworthy Wood—the green rock showed between them. Dark heath, and the red rock some under-shade of purple, covered the great slopes to the left of the Wood. None of these colours, the yellow-green of the oaks, the redness of the rocks, the dark purple of the heather, were brighter or darker; they were toned and quiet, yet perfectly distinct, higher, lighter; they were toned and in the brilliant sunshine.

At the first glance the colour was scarcely noticed ; in a moment the eye became conscious of it, and soon learned that to describe the scene these tints must be alluded to. Gradually the hues deepened as they were gazed at, till the great hillside grew aglow with the light they reflected.

All the view—the slopes, the wood, the heather—was instinct with the presence of the wild deer ; though sheltering in harbour from the heat, they were there. They had passed under the green larches, which were scarcely high enough to give me shade—the sun at noon looked down between the trees—they had drunk from the stream by the willow, whose dark boughs overhung it. I could have stayed and dreamed there by the splash-ing water, but there were yet more distances to be got over. I climbed up the rocky side, and from thence could see along the Badgeworthy Valley to the dull red precipice of rocky fragments that overlooks the Lynn. Passing more undulations of the moor there opened another coombe, this time deep and wide, and on the side towards me covered by a thick growth of larches. On the other it was bare.

As I followed a deer-path on the high ground at the edge, but above the copse, I continually saw marks of deer, slot of stag and hind ; some had been walking and some galloping. Three blackcocks rose and flew down the coombe, showing white streaks among their black feathers ; a bird, too, like a cuckoo rose from the ground, and flew to a little larch and perched on the top. When I came nearer it flew on again, and blundered into another larch ; doubtless a goat-sucker, or fern-owl, clumsy by day but swift at night. Suddenly two stags broke cover out on the bare hillside opposite ; they stopped and looked towards me. It was a splendid sight, for they were so near, within a stone's throw, and being on bare ground they were visible from slot to brow. They were the

same two I had seen previously on the heather, but then further off.

On the ruddy golden coat of the warrantable deer the bright sunlight shone, so that the colour seemed unsteady, or as if it was visibly emanating and flowing forth in undulations. The same thing may be seen about the white squares of rifle-targets under the midsummer sun; though white, square, and therefore by analogy well-defined, there is an unsteadiness of surface as if it came a little towards you, and was wavy. The deer are called red, and a few really appear very red against the heather, but the greater number of the stags are of a russet-gold, and the hinds always more or less brown. I do not know how to describe the stag's coat, as he stood and looked at me, except by some conjuncture of the colours red, or ruddy and gold. Underneath the russet-red of the coat there is a rich golden tint glowing through it.

Away he went the next minute, up the steep coombe-side, and as he went, followed by his companion, the difference was marked between their pace and that of the hinds. Stags throw their forefeet out much further, and hold their necks high, thrown back; their going is so different, that by it alone they can be distinguished at a distance from hinds. At the summit they stayed again and regarded me, then moved another quarter of a mile, and again looked back; and so constantly stopping to watch me, by degrees fetched a circle, and returned to the same cover far down in the coombe. I have called these stags for the convenience of writing, but strictly, in deer language, the largest one old enough for hunting was a stag; the other they would now call a young male deer; in the olden time he would have been called a brocke or brocket.

As I turned from the fir-cover out into the moor I noticed a small shrub of rhododendron flowering brightly

among the dark heather, far indeed from those tennis-lawns with which it is associated about town. It was the only flower at that time in all the miles of dark moor over which I had walked under the burning sun. Some one had planted it, some one who loved the tall deer. If you can find it—if—you will find a spot both wild and beautiful, for there the distances are relieved by the green firs of the coombe, and the oaks of the wood across the valley. But the boom of thunder again rolling under an unclouded sun once more reminded me of the immeasurable horizon of Exmoor.

## BIRDS OF THE FARMHOUSE.

WICK Farmhouse is thatched, and has many gables hidden with ivy. In these broad expanses of thatch, on the great "chimney tuns," as country folk call them, and in the ivy, tribes of birds have taken up their residence. The thatch has grown so thick in the course of years by the addition of fresh coats that it projects far from the walls and forms wide, far-reaching eaves. Over the cellar the roof descends within three or four feet of the ground, the wall being low, and the eaves here cast a shadow with the sun nearly at the zenith.

On the higher parts of the roof, especially round the chimneys, the starlings have made their holes, and in the early summer are continuously flying to and fro their young, who never cease crying for food the whole day through. A tall ash tree stands in the hedgerow, about fifty yards from the house. On this tree, which is detached, so that they can see all round, the starlings perch before they come to the roof, as if to reconnoitre, and to

exchange pourparlers with their friends already on the roof; for if ever birds talk together starlings do. 'Many birds utter the same notes over and over again; others sit on a branch and sing the same song, as the thrush; but the starling has a whole syllabary of his own, every note of which evidently has its meaning, and can be varied and accented at pleasure.

His whistle ranges from a shrill, piercing treble to a low, hollow bass; he runs a complete gamut, with "shakes," trills, tremulous vibrations, every possible variation. He intersperses a peculiar clucking sound, which seems to come from the depths of his breast, fluttering his wings all the while against his sides as he stands bolt upright on the edge of the chimney. Other birds seem to sing for the pure pleasure of singing, shedding their notes broadcast, or at most they are meant for a mate hidden in the bush. The starling addresses himself direct to his fellows; I think I may say he never sings when alone, without a companion in sight. He literally speaks to his fellows. I am persuaded you may almost follow the dialogue and guess the tenor of the discourse.

A starling is on the chimney top; yonder on the ash tree are four or five of his acquaintance. Suddenly he begins to pour forth a flood of eloquence—facing them as he speaks: Will they come with him down to the field where the cows are grazing? There will be sure to be plenty of insects settling on the grass round the cows, and every now and then they tear up the herbage by the roots and expose creeping things. "Come," you may hear him say, modulating his tones to persuasion, "come quickly; you see it is a fresh piece of grass into which the cows have been turned only a few hours since; it was too long for us before, but where they have eaten we can get at the ground comfortably. The water-wagtail is there already; he always accompanies the herd, and will have the pick

and choice of everything. Or what do you say to the meadow by the brook? The mowers have begun, and the swathe has fallen before their scythes; there are acres of ground there which we could not touch for weeks; now it is open, and the place is teeming with good food. The finches are there, as busy as may be between the swathes—chaffinch and greenfinch, hedge-sparrow, thrushes, and blackbirds too. Are you afraid? Why, no one shoots in the middle of a summer's day. Still irresolute? (with an angry shrillness). Will you or will you not? (a sharp, short whistle of interrogation). You are simply idiots (finishing with a scream of abuse). I'm off!"

Seeing him start, the rest follow him at once, jealous lest he should enjoy these pleasures alone. As he flies every few minutes he closes his wings, so that for half a dozen yards he shoots like an arrow through the air; then rapidly uses them, and again closes and shoots forward, all the time keeping a level straight course, going direct to his object.

The starlings that breed in the roof, though they leave the place later on and congregate in flocks roosting in trees, still come back now and then to revisit their homes, especially as the new year opens, when they alight on the house frequently and consult on the approaching important period of nesting. If you should be sitting near a window close under the roof where they are busy, reading a book, with the summer sunshine streaming in, now and then a flash like lightning will pass across the page. It is a starling rapidly vibrating his wings before he perches on the thatch; the swift succession of light and shadow as the wings intercept the rays of the sun causes an impression on the eye like that left by a flash of lightning. They are beautiful birds; on their plumage, when seen quite close, the light plays in iridescent gleams.

Upon the roof of the old farmstead, too, the chirp of the sparrow never ceases the livelong day. It is amusing to see these birds in the nesting season carrying up long straws—towing their burden through the air with evident labour—or feathers. These they sometimes drop just as they arrive at their destination. Eager to utter a chirp to their mates, they open their beaks, and away floats the feather, but they catch it again before it reaches the ground. Fluffy feathers are great favourites. The fowls, as they fly up to roost on the beams in the sheds, beat out feathers from their clumsy wings; these lie scattered on the ground, marking the spot. These roosting places are magazines from which the small birds draw their supplies for domestic purposes. The sparrows have their nests in lesser holes in the thatch; sometimes they use a swallow's nest built of mortar under the eaves, to which the owners have not returned.

The older folk still retain some faint superstitions about swallows, looking upon them as semi-consecrated, and not to be killed or interfered with. They will not have their nests knocked down. If they do not return to the eaves, but desert their nests, it is a sign of misfortune impending over the household. So, too, if the rooks quit the rookery, or the colonies of bees in the hives on the sunny side of the orchard decay and do not swarm, but seem to die off, it is an evil omen. If at night a bird flutters against the window-pane in the darkness—as they will sometimes in a great storm of wind, driven, perhaps, from their roosting places by the breaking of the boughs, and attracted by a light within—the knocking of their wings betokens that something sad is about to happen. If an invalid asks for a pigeon—taking a fancy to a dish of pigeons to eat—it is a sign either of coming dissolution or of extreme illness.

But the swallows rarely fail to come in the spring,



and soon begin to repair their nests or build new ones with mortar from the roads; a rainy day is very useful to them, and they alight at the edge of the puddles, finding the mud already mixed and tempered for them there. In such weather they will fly backwards and forwards by the side of a hedge for a length of time, skimming just above the grass, when, looking down on them instead of up at them, the white bar across the lower part of the body just before the tail forks is very noticeable. The darker feathers have a glossy bluish tinge on the black. They seem fond of flying round and near horses and cattle, as if insects were more numerous near animals. While driving on a sultry day I have watched a swallow follow the horse for a mile or more.

It is a pleasant sight to watch them gliding just above the surface of smooth water, dipping every now and then. Once, while observing some swallows flying over a lake, on a windy day, when there were waves of some size, I saw a swallow struck by the crest of a wave and overwhelmed. It was about twenty yards from a lee shore, and the bird floated on the water, rising and sinking with the waves till they threw it on the bank. It was much exhausted, but when placed on a stone in the warm sunshine soon recovered and flew off.

As another proof that, quick as they are on the wing, they do not always judge their position or course precisely, I know a case where a swallow, in less than ten yards after leaving her nest under the eaves of a house, flew with great force against a door in the garden wall painted a dull blue. The beak was partly broken and the bird completely stunned: she died in a few minutes. There was some one in the garden close by at the time: his presence may have frightened the swallow; yet they are not usually timid where their nests are undisturbed. Perhaps, in her hurry the dull blue colour of the gate may

## SELECTIONS

have deceived her sight; but she must have made that way a hundred times before.

Swallows frequently come down the great chimney of the farmhouse, and are found in the rooms, but are not allowed to escape from the window. Swallows are not to perch; but I have seen them repeatedly perched on those sticks which, where the thatch has somewhat decayed, project a few inches above the roof-tree. Sometimes a row of half a dozen may be observed settled on the boughs of the tall damson trees in the orchard; and later in the autumn, after nesting is over, they come in hundreds—one might almost say thousands—with a bed by the brook, settling on the slender wanders. There they twitter together for an hour every evening. They can rise without the slightest culty from the ground, if it is level and not encumbered with grass, as from the surface of the roads. On cold days they settle on the house more frequently when it is bright and sunny.

At one end of the farmhouse, which is a building, there is a quiet gable, and in it a thick over by the thatch, and shaded by a thick casement is low, and not more than eight feet from the ground; the ivy has climbed all of the gable, spread, too, over the massive wall, so that there abuts upon the house, at the angle. Here some corner formed by the angle. Here some number of logs of timber—oak, such as are used for posts for field gateways—were left leaning against the garden wall, half against the house, just under the roof. There they have remained (there is never a dish of things in the country) so long that the ivy has encased the lower portions. What a scene! the thatch, the thick ivy, the timber thrown over the spring

hen-grown garden wall, and a large bush of lilac in the middle, the place could hardly be more quiet, and is consequently a favourite resort of the birds.

Within reach from the window the swallows have their nests, and the sparrows their holes, on the right hand; on the left hand, among the ivy, the water-tail has built her nest year after year. The wagtail is always seen about the place—now in the cowyards near the cattle, now in the rickyard, and even close to the door of the dwelling-house, especially frequenting the yard in front of the dairy. As he flies he rises up and then sinks again, in a succession of undulations, now spreading the tail out and now closing it. On the ground he generally alights near water; he is continually jerking his tail up and down.

One spring a cuckoo came to this nest in the ivy close to the casement; she was seen flying near the house several times, and, being observed to visit the ivy-covered place, was finally traced to the wagtail's nest. For several days in succession, and several times a day, the cuckoo

It would doubtless have left an egg had not she been seen by a person who wanted a cuckoo to stuff.

It is difficult to understand upon what principle the bird has elected a nest thus placed. The ordinary considerations put forward as guiding birds and animals in their choice of a nest quite fail. Instinct would scarcely choose a nest so close to a house—actually on it; the desire of concealment would not lead to it either, nor the idea of escape from houses, and much more likely to escape from a dull blue sky. Was there any kind of feeling that this wagtail was more likely to take care of the nest than others?

the cuckoo's alleged total indifference to her presence may have certainly linger in the neighbourhood of the not usually timid wagtail. Perhaps in her

nets which they have selected to deposit their eggs in. On another occasion a cuckoo used a wagtail's nest in a different part of the garden here—in some ivy that had grown round the decaying stump of an old fir tree. This bird was watched, but not interfered with; she came repeatedly, and was seen on the nest, and the egg observed. Afterwards a cuckoo sang continuously day after day on an ash tree close to the garden.

Lower down in the ivy, behind the logs of timber under the casement, the hedge-sparrow builds every year; and on the wood itself where the trunks formed a little recess was a robin's nest. The hedge-sparrow, unlike his noisy namesake, is one of the quietest of birds: he slips about in the hedges and bushes all round the garden so quietly and unobtrusively that unless you watch carefully you will not see him. Yet he does not seem shy, and if you sit still will come along the hawthorn within a yard.

In the thatch—under the eaves of the cellar, which are not more than four feet from the ground, and come up to the ivy of the gable—the wren has a nest. Some birds seem always to make their nests in one particular kind of way, and generally in the same kind of tree or bush; robins, house-sparrows, and starlings, on the other hand, adjust their nests to all sorts of places.

The window of a room in which I used to sleep overlooked the orchard, and there was a pear tree trained against the wall, some of the boughs of which came up to the window-sill. This pear tree acted as a ladder, up which the birds came. Pear trees are a good deal frequented by many birds; their rough bark seems to shelter numerous insects. The window was left open all night in the sultry summer weather, and presently a robin began to come in very early in the morning. Encouraged by finding that no one disturbed him, at last he grew bold enough to perch morning after morning on

the rail at the foot of my bed. First he seemed to examine the inside of the window, then went on the floor, and, after a good look round, finally finished by sitting on the wooden framework for a few minutes before departing.

This went on some time; then a wren came too; she likewise looked to see if anything edible could be found in the window first. Old-fashioned windows often have a broad sill inside, the window frame being placed nearly at the outer edge of the wall, so that the thickness of the wall forms a recess, which is lined with board along the bottom. Now, this wooden lining was decayed and drilled with innumerable holes by boring insects, which threw up tiny heaps of sawdust, as one might say, just as moles throw up mounds of earth where they tunnel. Perhaps these formed an attraction to the wren; she also frequently visited an old-fashioned bookcase, on the top of which—it was very low—I often left some old worm-eaten folios and quartos, and may have occasionally picked up something there. Once only she ventured to the foot of the bed. After leaving the room she always perched on a thin iron projection which held the window open, and uttered her singularly loud notes, their metallic clearness seeming to make the chamber ring. Starlings often perched on the same iron slide, and sparrows continually; but only the robin and wren came inside. Tomtits occasionally entered and explored the same board-lining of the window, but no farther. They will, however, sometimes explore a room.

I know a parlour, the window of which was partly overhung by a similar pear tree, besides which there were some shrubs just outside, and into this room, which was quiet and little used, the tomtits ventured every now and then. I fancy the placing of flowers in vases on the table or on the mantelpiece attracts birds to rooms, if they are still.

Insects visit the flowers; birds look for the insects: and this room generally abounded with cut flowers. Entering it suddenly one day, a tomtit flew from side to side in great agitation, and then dropped on the floor and allowed me to pick it up without an effort to escape. The bird had swooned from fright, and was quite helpless—the eyes closed. On being placed outside the window, in five minutes it came to itself and flew off feebly. In this way birds may frequently become a prey to cats and hawks when to all appearance they might easily escape, becoming so overwhelmed with alarm as to lose the power of motion.

The robin is a most pugnacious creature. He will fight furiously with a rival: in fact, he never misses an opportunity of fighting. But he always chooses the very early morning for these encounters, and so escapes suspicion, except, of course, from people who rise early too. It is even said that the young cock robins, when they are full grown, turn round on their own parents and fight with them vigorously. Neither is he a favourite with the upper class of cottagers—for there is an “upper ten” even among cottagers—who have large fruit-gardens. In these they grow quantities of currants for preserving purposes. The robin is accused of being a terrible thief of currants, and meets with scant mercy.

Sometimes while walking slowly along the footpath in a lane with hedges each side, a robin will dart out of the hawthorn and pick up a worm or grub almost under your feet; then in his alarm at your presence drop it, and rush back in a flutter. Other birds will do the same thing, from which it would seem that the old saying that *the eye sees what it comes to see* is as applicable to them as to human beings. Their eyes, ever on the watch for food, instantly detect a tiny creeping thing several yards distant, though concealed by grass; but the comparatively

immense bulk of a man appears to escape notice till they fly almost up against it.

I fancy that the hive bee and some kindred insects have a special faculty of seeing colour at a distance, and that colours attract them. It can hardly be scent, because when flowers are placed in a room and the window left open, the wind generally blows strongly into the apartment, and odours will not travel against a breeze. It seems natural that in both cases the continual watch for certain things should enable bird and insect to observe the faintest indication. Slugs, caterpillars, and such creatures, too, in moving among the grass, cause a slight agitation of the grass-blades; they lift up a leaf by crawling under it, or depress it with their weight by getting on it. This may enable the bird to detect their presence, even when quite hidden by the herbage, experience having taught it that when grass is moved by the wind broad patches sway simultaneously, but when an insect or caterpillar is the agent only a single leaf or blade is stirred.

At the farmhouse here, robins, wrens, and tomtits are always hanging about the courtyard, especially close to the dairy, where one or other may be constantly seen perched on the palings; neither do they scruple to enter the dairy, the brewhouse, or woodhouse adjacent, when they see a chance. The logs (for fuel) stored in the latter doubtless afford them insects from under the dead bark.

Among the most constant residents in the garden at Wick Farm are the song-thrushes. They are the tamest of the larger birds; they come every morning right under the old bay window of the sitting-room on the shady side of the house, where the musk-plant has spread abroad and covered the stone-pitching for many yards, except just a narrow path paved with broad flagstones. The musk finds root in every interstice of the pitching, but cannot push up through the solid flat flags; a fungus,

however, has attempted even that, and has succeeded in forcing a great stone, weighing perhaps fifteen or twenty pounds, from its bed, so that instead of being level it forms an inclined plane. The carpet of musk yields a pleasant odour; in one corner, too, the "monkey-plant" grows luxuriously, and the grass of the green or lawn is for ever trying to encroach upon the paving. In the centre of the green is a bed of gooseberries and a cherry tree; and though the fruit is so close to the window, both thrush and blackbird make as free with it as if it was in the hedgerow.

The thrush, when he wishes to approach the house, flies first to the cover of these gooseberries; then, after reconnoitring a few minutes, comes out on the green, and gradually works his way across it to the stone-pitching, and so along under the very window. The blackbird comes almost as often to the lawn, but it is in a different way. His manner is that of a bold marauder, conscious that he has no right, and aware that a shot from an ambuscade may lay him low, but defiantly risking the danger. He perches first on a bush, or on the garden wall, under the sheltering boughs of the lime trees, at a distance of some twenty yards; then, waiting till all is clear, he makes a desperate rush for the fruit trees or the lawn. The moment he has succeeded in violently seizing some delicious morsel, off he goes, uttering a loud chuckle—half as a challenge, half as a vent for his pent-up anxiety.

This peculiar chuckle is so well known by all the other birds as a note of alarm that every one in the garden immediately moves his position, if only a yard or two. When you are stealing down the side of the hedgerow, endeavouring to get near enough to observe the woodpecker in a tree, or with a gun to shoot a pigeon, the great anxiety is lest you startle a blackbird. If he thinks you have not seen him, he is cunning enough to



slip out on the other side noiselessly and fly down beside the hedge just above the ground for some distance. He then crosses the field to a hedge on the other side, and, just as he safely lands himself in a thick hawthorn bush a hundred yards away, defiantly utters his cry. The pigeon or the woodpecker will instantly glance round; but, the cry being at a distance, if you keep still a minute or two they will resume their occupation. But if you should disturb the blackbird on the side of the bank next you, where he knows you must have seen or heard him, or if he is obliged to come out on your side of the hedge, then he makes the meadow ring with his alarm-note, and immediately away goes pigeon or woodpecker, thrushes fly farther down the hedge, and the rabbits feeding in the grass lift up their heads and, seeing you, rush to their burrows. In this way the blackbird acts as a general sentinel.

He has two variations of this cry. One he uses when just about to change his feeding ground and visit another corner across the field; it is as much as to say, "Take notice, all you menials; I, the king of the hedge, am coming." The other is a warning, and will very often set two or three other blackbirds calling in the same way whose existence till then was unsuspected. These calls are quite distinct from his song.

Sometimes, when sitting on a rail in the shade of a great bush—a rail placed to close a gap—I have had a blackbird come across the meadow and perch just above my head. Till the moment of alighting he was ignorant of my presence, and for a second the extremity of his astonishment literally held him speechless at his own temerity. The next—what an outcry and furious bustle of excitement to escape! So in the garden here he makes a desperate rush, seizes his prey, and off again twenty or thirty yards, exhibiting an amusing mixture of courage

and timidity. This process he will repeat fifty times a day. No matter how terribly frightened, his assurance quickly returns, and another foray follows; so that you begin by thinking him the most cowardly and end by finding him the most impudent of birds.

I own I love the blackbird, and never weary of observing him. There is a bold English independence about him—an insolent consciousness of his own beauty. He must somehow have read Shakespeare, for he seems quite aware of his "orange tawny bill" and deep black hue. He might really know that he figures in a famous ballad, and that four-and-twenty of his species were considered a dish to set before a king.

It is a sight to see him take his bath. In a meadow not far from the house here is a shallow but clear streamlet, running down a deep broad ditch overshadowed by tall hemlock and clogweed, arched over with willow, whose leaves when the wind blows and their under side is exposed give the hedge a grey tint, with maple and brier. Hide yourself here on a summer morning among the dry grass and bushes, and presently the blackbird comes to stand a minute on a stone which checks the tiny stream like a miniature rock, and then to splash the clear water over head and back with immense energy. He repeats this several times, and immediately afterwards flies to an adjacent rail, where, unfettered by boughs, he can preen his feathers, going through his toilet with the air of a prince. Finally, he perks his tail up, and challenges the world with the call already mentioned, which seems now to mean, "Come and see Me; am I not handsome?"

On a warm June day, when the hedges are covered with roses and the air is sweet with the odour of mown grass, it is pleasant to listen to the blackbirds in the oaks pouring forth their rich liquid notes. There is no note so sweet and deep and melodious as that of the blackbird

to be heard in our fields; it is even richer than the nightingale's, though not so varied. Just before noon-day—between eleven and twelve—when the heat increases, he leaves the low thick bushes and moist ditches and mounts up into an oak tree, where on a branch he sits and sings. Then another at a distance takes up the burden, till by and by, as you listen, partly hidden in a gateway, four or five are thus engaged in the trees of a single meadow.

He sings in a quiet, leisurely way, as a great artist should: there is no haste, no notes thickening on notes in swift crescendo. His voice (so to speak) drops from him without an effort, and is so clear that it may be heard at a long distance. It is not a set song; perhaps, in strict language, it is hardly a song at all, but rather a succession of detached notes with intervals between. Except when singing, the blackbird does not often frequent trees; he is a hedge-bird, though sometimes, when you are looking at a field of green corn or beans, one will rise out of it and fly to a tree—a solitary tree such as is sometimes seen in the midst of an arable field. At Wick Farm, sitting in the cool parlour, or in the garden under the shade of the trees, you may hear him almost every morning in the meadows that come right up to the orchard hedge. That hedge is his favourite approach to the garden: he flies to it first, and gradually works his way along under cover till nearer the cultivated beds. Both blackbird and thrush are particularly fond of visiting a patch of cabbages in a shady, quiet corner: there are generally two or three there after the worms and caterpillars, and so forth.

The thrushes build in the garden in several places, especially in an ivy-hidden arbour—a wooden frame completely covered with ivy and creeping flowers. Close by is a thick box hedge, six feet high and nearly as much

ture of the out behind this is a low, thatched tool-house, where spades, mole-traps, scythes, reaping-hooks, and other implements are kept. Here lies a sarsen-stone, hard as iron—about a foot thick, the top of which chances to be smooth and level. This is the thrush's favourite anvil.

He can be seen about under the ivy, under which the snails bide in their shells in the heat of the day, and brings them forth into the light. The shell is too large for his beak to hold it pincer-fashion, but at the entrance

the snail's doorway—he can thrust his bill in, and woe then to the miserable occupant! With a hop and a flutter the thrush mounts the stone anvil, and there destroys his victim in workmanlike style. Up goes his head, lifting the snail high in the air, and then, smash! the shell comes down on the stone with all the force he can use. About two such blows break the shell, and he then coolly chips the fragments off as you might from an egg, and makes very few mouthfuls of the contents. On the stone and round about it lie the fragments of many such shells—relics of former feasts. Sometimes he will do this close to the bay window—if all is quiet—using the stone flags for an anvil, if he chances to find a snail hard by; but he prefers the recess behind the box hedge. The thrushes seem half domesticated here; they are tame, too, in the hedges, and will sit and sing on a bough overhead without fear while you wait for a rabbit on the bank beneath.

## WINDS OF HEAVEN.

THE window rattled, the gate swang; a leaf rose, and the kitten chased it, "whoo-oo"—the faintest sound in the keyhole. I looked up, and saw the feathers on a sparrow's breast ruffled for an instant. It was quiet for some time; after a while it came again with heavier purpose. The folded shutters shook; the latch of the kitchen door rattled as if some one were lifting it and dropping it; indefinite noises came from upstairs: there was a hand in the house moving everything. Another pause. The kitten was curled up on the window ledge outside in the sunshine, just as the sleek cats curled up in the warmth at Thebes of old Egypt five or six thousand years ago; the sparrow was happy at the rose tree; a bee was happy on a broad dandelion disc. "Soo-hoo!"—a low whistle came through the chink; a handful of rain was flung at the window; a great shadow rushed up the valley and strode the house in an instant as you would get over a stile. I put down my book and buttoned my coat. "Soo-hoo!" the wind was here and the cloud—"soo-hoo!" drawing out longer and more plaintive in the thin mouthpiece of the chink. The cloud had no more rain in it, but it shut out the sun; and all that afternoon and all that night the low plaint of the wind continued in sorrowful hopelessness, and little sounds ran about the floors and round the rooms.

Still "soo-hoo" and sunlessness all the next day, turning the mind, through work and conversation, to pensive notes. At even the edge of the cloud lifted over the forest hill westwards, and a yellow glow, the great beacon-fire of the sun, burned out, a conflagration at the verge of the world. In the night, awaking gently as one who is

whispered to—listen! Ah! all the orchestra is at work—the keyhole, the chink, and the chimney; whoo-hooing in the keyhole, whistling shrill “whew-w-w!” in the chink, moaning long and deep in the chimney. Over in the field the row of pines was sighing; the wind lingered and clung to the close foliage, and each needle of the million million leaflets drew its tongue across the organ blast. A countless multitude of sighs made one continued distant undertone to the wild roar of the gable close at hand. Something seemed to be running with innumerable centipede feet over the mouth of the chimney, for the long deep moan, as I listened, resolved itself into a quick succession of touches, just as you might play with your finger tips, fifty times a second tattooing on the hollow table. In the midst of the clangour the hearing settled down to the sighing of the pines, which drew the mind towards it, and soothed the senses to sleep.

Towards dawn, awake again—another change: the battering-ram at work now against the walls. Swinging back, the solid thickness of the wind came forward—crush! as the iron-shod ram’s head hanging from its chains rushed to the tower. Crush! It sucked back again as if there had been a vacuum—a moment’s silence, and crush! Blow after blow—the floor heaved; the walls were ready to come together—alternate sucking back and heavy billowy advance. Crush! crush! Blow after blow, heave and batter and hoist, as if it would tear the house up by the roots. Forty miles that battering-ram wind had travelled without so much as a bough to check it till it struck the house on the hill. Thud! thud! as if it were iron and not air. I looked from the window, and the bright morning star was shining—the sky was full of the wind and the star. As light came, the thud-thud sank away, and nothing remained but the whoo-hoo-hoo of the keyhole and the moan of the chimney.

unknown. In a small space there seems a vacuum, and nothing between you and the hedge opposite, or even across the valley; in a great space the void is filled, and the wind touches the sight like a thing tangible. The air becomes itself a cloud, and is coloured—recognized as a thing suspended; something real exists between you and the horizon. Now full of sun, and now of shade, the air-cloud rests in the expanse.

It is summer, and the wind-birds top the furze; the bright stonechat, velvet-black and red and white, sits on the highest spray of the gorse, as if he were painted there. He is always in the wind on the hill, from the hail of April to August's dry glow. All the mile-long slope of the hill under me is purple-clad with heath down to the tree-filled gorge where the green boughs seem to join the purple. The corn fields and the pastures of the plain—count them one by one till the hedges and squares close together and cannot be separated. The surface of the earth melts away as if the eyes insensibly shut and grow dreamy in gazing, as the soft clouds melt and lose their outline at the horizon. But dwelling there, the glance slowly finds and fills out something that interposes its existence between us and the further space. Too shadowy for the substance of a cloud, too delicate for outline against the sky, fainter than haze, something of which the eye has consciousness, but cannot put into a word to itself. Something is there. It is the air-cloud adhering like a summer garment to the great downs by the sea. I cannot see the substance of the hills nor their exact curve along the sky; all I can see is the air that has thickened and taken to itself form about them. The atmosphere has collected as the shadow collects in the distant corner of a room—it is the shadow of the summer wind. At times it is so soft, so little more than the air at hand, that I almost fancy I can look through the solid boundary. There is no cloud

so faint; the great hills are but a thought at the horizon; I *think* them there rather than see them; if I were not thinking of them, I should scarce know there was even a haze, with so dainty a hand does the atmosphere throw its covering over the massy downs. Riding or passing quickly perhaps you would not observe them; but stay among the heathbells, and the sketch appears in the south. Up from the sea over the corn fields, through the green boughs of the forest, along the slope, comes a breath of wind, of honey-sweetened air, made more delicate by the fanning of a thousand wings.

The labour of the wind: the cymbals of the aspen clashing, from the lowest to the highest bough, each leaf twirling first forwards and then backwards and swinging to and fro, a double motion. Each lifts a little and falls back like a pendulum, twisting on itself; and as it rises and sinks, strikes its fellow-leaf. Striking the side of the dark pines, the wind changes their colour and turns them paler. The oak leaves slide one over the other, hand above hand, laying shadow upon shadow upon the white road. In the vast net of the wide elm tops the drifting shadow of the cloud which the wind brings is caught for a moment. Pushing aside the stiff ranks of the wheat with both arms, the air reaches the sun-parched earth. It walks among the mowing grass like a farmer feeling the 'crop with his hand one side, and opening it with his walking stick the other. It rolls the wavelets carelessly as marbles to the shore; the red cattle redden the pool and stand in their own colour. The green caterpillar swings as he spins his thread and lengthens his cable to the tide of air, descending from the tree; before he can slip it the whitethroat takes him. With a thrust the wind hurls the swift fifty miles faster on his way; it ruffles back the black velvet of the mole peeping forth from his burrow. Apple bloom and crab-apple bloom have been



blown long since athwart the furrows over the orchard wall; May petals and June roses scattered; the pollen and the seeds of the meadow grasses thrown on the threshing floor of earth in basketfuls. Thistle down and dandelion down, the brown down of the goat's-beard; by and by the keys of the sycamores twirling aslant—the wind carries them all on its back, gossamer web and great heron's vanes—the same weight to the wind; the drops of the waterfall blown aside sprinkle the bright green ferns. The voice of the cuckoo in his season travels on the zephyr, and the note comes to the most distant hill, and deep into the deepest wood.

The light and fire of summer are made beautiful by the air, without whose breath the glorious summer were all spoiled. Thick are the hawthorn leaves, many deep on the spray; and beneath them there is a twisted and intertangled winding in and out of boughs, such as no curious ironwork of ancient artist could equal; through the leaves and metal-work of boughs the soft west wind wanders at its ease. Wild wasp and tutored bee sing sideways on their course as the breeze fills their vanes: with broad coloured sails boomed out, the butterfly drifts alee. Beside a brown-coated stone in the shadowed stream a brown trout watches for the puffs that slay the May-flies. Their ephemeral wings were made for a more exquisite life; they endure but one sun; they bear not the touch of the water; they die like a dream dropping into the river. To the amethyst in the deep ditch the wind comes; no petal so hidden under green it cannot find; to the blue hill-flower up by the sky; it lifts the guilty head of the passionate poppy that has sinned in the sun for love. Sweet is the rain the wind brings to the wallflower browned in the heat, a-dry on the crumbling stone. Pleasant the sunbeams to the marigold when the wind has carried the rain away and his sun-disc glows

on the bank. Acres of perfume come on the wind from the black and white of the bean field; the firs fill the air by the copse with perfume. I know nothing to which the wind has not some happy use. Is there a grain of dust so small the wind shall not find it out? Ground in the mill-wheel of the centuries, the iron of the distant mountain floats like gossamer, and is drunk up as dew by leaf and living lung. A thousand miles of cloud go by from morn till night, passing overhead without a sound; the immense packs, a mile square, succeed to each other, side by side, laid parallel, book-shape, coming up from the horizon and widening as they approach. From morn till night the silent footfalls of the ponderous vapours travel overhead, no sound, no creaking of the wheels and rattling of the chains; it is calm at the earth, but the wind labours without an effort above, with such ease, with such power. Grey smoke hangs on the hill-side where the couch heaps are piled, a cumulus of smoke; the wind comes, and it draws its length along like the genii from the earthen pot; there leaps up a great red flame shaking its head; it shines in the bright sunlight; you can see it across the valley.

A perfect summer day with a strong south wind; a cloudless blue sky blown pale, a summer sun blown cool, deep draughts of refreshing air to man and horse, clear definition of red-tiled roof and conical oast, perfect colour of soft ash-green trees. In the evening, fourteen black swifts rushing together through the upper atmosphere with shrill cries, sometimes aside and on the tip of one wing, with a whirl descending, a black trail, to the tiled ridge they dwell in. Fine weather after this.

A swooning August day, with a hot east wind, from which there is no escape, which gives no air to the chest—you breathe and are not satisfied with the inspiration;

it does not fill; there is no life in the killed atmosphere. It is a vacuum of heat, and yet the strong hot wind bends the trees and the tall firs wrestle with it as they did with Sinis the Pine-bender, bowed down and rebounding as if they would whirl their cones away like a catapult. Masses of air are moving by, and yet there is none to breathe. No escape in the shadow of hedge or wood, or in the darkened room; darkness excludes the heat that comes with light, but the heat of the oven-wind cannot be shut out. Some monstrous dragon of the Chinese sky pants his fiery breath upon us, and the brown grass stalks threaten to catch flame in the field. The grain of wheat that was full of juice dries hard in the ears, and water is no more good for thirst. There is not a cloud in the sky; but at night there is heavy rain, and the flowers are beaten down. There is a thunder-wind that blows at intervals when great clouds are visibly gathering over the hay field. It is almost a calm; but from time to time a breath comes, and a low mournful cry sounds in the hollow farmhouse—the windows and doors are open, and the men and women have gone out to make hasty help in the hay ere the storm—a mournful cry in the hollow house, as unhappy a note as if it were soaked February.

In April, six miles away in the valley, a vast cloud came down with swan-shot of hail, black as blackest smoke, overwhelming house and wood, all gone and mixed with the sky; and behind the mass there followed a white cloud, sunlit, dragging along the ground like a cumulus fallen to the earth. At sunset the sky cleared, and under the glowing rim of the sun a golden wind drove the host of vapour before it, scattering it to the right and left. Large pieces caught and tore themselves in the trees of the forest, and one curved fragment hurled from the ridge fell in the narrow coombe, lit up as it came

down with golden sunset rays, standing out bright against the shadowed wood. Down it came slowly as it were with outstretched arms, loth to fall, carrying the coloured light of the sky to the very surface of the earth.

## THE PAGEANT OF SUMMER.

### I.

GREEN rushes, long and thick, standing up above the edge of the ditch, told the hour of the year as distinctly as the shadow on the dial the hour of the day. Green and thick and sappy to the touch, they felt like summer, soft and elastic, as if full of life, mere rushes though they were. On the fingers they left a green scent; rushes have a separate scent of green, so, too, have ferns, very different from that of grass or leaves. Rising from brown sheaths, the tall stems, enlarged a little in the middle, like classical columns, and heavy with their sap and freshness, leaned against the hawthorn sprays. From the earth they had drawn its moisture, and made the ditch dry; some of the sweetness of the air had entered into their fibres, and the rushes—the common rushes—were full of beautiful summer. The white pollen of early grasses growing on the edge was dusted from them each time the hawthorn boughs were shaken by a thrush. These lower sprays came down in among the grass, and leaves and grass blades touched. Smooth round stems of angelica, big as a gun barrel, hollow and strong, stood on the slope of the mound, their tiers of well-balanced branches rising like those of a tree. Such a sturdy growth pushed back the ranks of hedge parsley in full

white flower, which blocked every avenue and winding bird's path of the bank. But the "gix," or wild parsnip, reached already high above both, and would rear its fluted stalk, joint on joint, till it could face a man. Trees they were to the lesser birds, not even bending if perched on; but though so stout, the birds did not place their nests on or against them. Something in the odour of these umbelliferous plants, perhaps, is not quite liked; if brushed or bruised they give out a bitter greenish scent. Under their cover, well shaded and hidden, birds build, but not against or on the stems, though they will affix their nests to much less certain supports. With the grasses that overhung the edge, with the rushes in the ditch itself, and these great plants on the mound, the whole hedge was wrapped and thickened. No cunning of glance could see through it; it would have needed a ladder to help any one look over.

It was between the may and the June roses. The may bloom had fallen, and among the hawthorn boughs were the little green bunches that would feed the red-wings in autumn. High up the briars had climbed, straight and towering while there was a thorn or an ash sapling, or a yellow-green willow, to uphold them, and then curving over towards the meadow. The buds were on them, but not yet open; it was between the may and the rose.

As the wind, wandering over the sea, takes from each wave an invisible portion, and brings to those on shore the ethereal essence of ocean, so the air lingering among the woods and hedges—green waves and billows—became full of fine atoms of summer. Swept from notched hawthorn leaves, broad-topped oak leaves, narrow ash sprays and oval willows; from vast elm cliffs and sharp-taloned brambles under; brushed from the waving grasses and stiffening corn, the dust of the sunshine was borne

along and breathed. Steeped in flower and pollen to the music of bees and birds, the stream of the atmosphere became a living thing. It was life to breathe it, for the air itself was life. The strength of the earth went up through the leaves into the wind. Fed thus on the food of the Immortals, the heart opened to the width and depth of the summer—to the broad horizon afar, down to the minutest creature in the grass, up to the highest swallow. Winter shows us Matter in its dead form, like the Primary rocks, like granite and basalt—clear but cold and frozen crystal. Summer shows us Matter changing into life, sap rising from the earth through a million tubes, the alchemic power of light entering the solid oak; and see! it bursts forth in countless leaves. Living things leap in the grass, living things drift upon the air, living things are coming forth to breathe in every hawthorn bush. No longer does the immense weight of Matter—the dead, the crystallized—press ponderously on the thinking mind. The whole office of Matter is to feed life—to feed the green rushes, and the roses that are about to be; to feed the swallows above, and us that wander beneath them. So much greater is this green and common rush than all the Alps.

Fanning so swiftly, the wasp's wings are but just visible as he passes; did he pause, the light would be apparent through their texture. On the wings of the dragon-fly as he hovers an instant before he darts there is a prismatic gleam. These wing textures are even more delicate than the minute filaments on a swallow's quill, more delicate than the pollen of a flower. They are formed of matter indeed, but how exquisitely it is resolved into the means and organs of life! Though not often consciously recognized, perhaps this is the great pleasure of summer, to watch the earth, the dead particles, resolving themselves into the living case of life, to see the

seed-leaf push aside the clod and become by degrees the perfumed flower. From the tiny mottled egg come the wings that by and by shall pass the immense sea. It is in this marvellous transformation of clods and cold matter into living things that the joy and the hope of summer reside. Every blade of grass, each leaf, each separate floret and petal, is an inscription speaking of hope. Consider the grasses and the oaks, the swallows, the sweet blue butterfly—they are one and all a sign and token showing before our eyes earth made into life. So that my hope becomes as broad as the horizon afar, reiterated by every leaf, sung on every bough, reflected in the gleam of every flower. There is so much for us yet to come, so much to be gathered and enjoyed. Not for you or me, now, but for our race, who will ultimately use this magical secret for their happiness. Earth holds secrets enough to give them the life of the fabled Immortals. My heart is fixed firm and stable in the belief that ultimately the sunshine and the summer, the flowers and the azure sky, shall become, as it were, interwoven into man's existence. He shall take from all their beauty and enjoy their glory. Hence it is that a flower is to me so much more than stalk and petals. When I look in the glass I see that every line in my face means pessimism; but in spite of my face—that is my experience—I remain an optimist. Time with an unsteady hand has etched thin crooked lines, and, deepening the hollows, has cast the original expression into shadow. Pain and sorrow flow over us with little ceasing, as the sea-hoofs beat on the beach. Let us not look at ourselves, but onwards, and take strength from the leaf and the signs of the field. He is indeed despicable who cannot look onwards to the ideal life of man. Not to do so is to deny our birthright of mind.

The long grass flowing towards the hedge has reared in

a wave against it. Along the hedge it is higher and greener, and rustles into the very bushes. There is only a mark now where the footpath was; it passed close to the hedge, but its place is traceable only as a groove in the sorrel and seed tops. Though it has quite filled the path, the grass there cannot send its tops so high; it has left a winding crease. By the hedge here stands a moss-grown willow, and its slender branches extend over the sward. Beyond it is an oak, just apart from the bushes; then the ground gently rises, and an ancient pollard ash, hollow and black inside, guards an open gateway like a low tower. The different tone of green shows that the hedge is there of nut trees; but one great hawthorn spreads out in a semicircle, roofing the grass which is yet more verdant in the still pool (as it were) under it. Next a corner, more oaks, and a chestnut in bloom. Returning to this spot an old apple tree stands right out in the meadow like an island. There seemed just now the tiniest twinkle of movement by the rushes, but it was lost among the hedge parsley. Among the grey leaves of the willow there is another flit of motion; and visible now against the sky there is a little brown bird, not to be distinguished at the moment from the many other little brown birds that are known to be about. He got up into the willow from the hedge parsley somehow, without being seen to climb or fly. Suddenly he crosses to the tops of the hawthorn and immediately flings himself up into the air a yard or two, his wings and ruffled crest making a ragged outline; jerk, jerk, jerk, as if it were with the utmost difficulty he could keep even at that height. He scolds, and twitters, and chirps, and all at once sinks like a stone into the hedge and out of sight as a stone into a pond. It is a whitethroat; his nest is deep in the parsley and nettles. Presently he will go out to the island apple tree and back again in a minute or two; the pair of them are



so fond of each other's affectionate company they cannot remain apart

Watching the line of the hedge, about every two minutes, either near at hand or yonder, a bird darts out just at the level of the grass, hovers a second with labouring wings, and returns as swiftly to the cover. Sometimes it is a flycatcher, sometimes a greenfinch or chaffinch, now and then a robin, in one place a shrike, perhaps another is a redstart. They are fly-fishing all of them, seizing insects from the sorrel tips and grass, as the kingfisher takes a roach from the water. A blackbird slips up into the oak and a dove descends in the corner by the chestnut tree. But these are not visible together, only one at a time and with intervals. The larger part of the life of the hedge is out of sight. All the thrush fledgelings, the young blackbirds, and finches are hidden, most of them on the mound among the ivy and parsley and rough grasses, protected too by a roof of brambles. The nests that still have eggs are not, like the nests of the early days of April, easily found; they are deep down in the tangled herbage by the shore of the ditch, or far inside the thorny thickets which then looked mere bushes, and are now so broad. Landrails are running in the grass concealed as a man would be in a wood; they have nests and eggs on the ground for which you may search in vain till the mowers come.

Up in the corner a fragment of white fur and marks of scratching show where a doe has been preparing for a litter. Some well-trodden runs lead from mound to mound; they are sandy near the hedge where the particles have been carried out adhering to the rabbits' feet and fur. A crow rises lazily from the upper end of the field, and perches in the chestnut. His presence, too, was unsuspected. He is there by far too frequently. At this season the crows are always in the mowing grass,

searching about, stalking in winding tracks from furrow to furrow, picking up an egg here and a foolish fledgeling that has wandered from the mound yonder. Very likely there may be a moorhen or two slipping about under cover of the long grass; thus hidden, they can leave the shelter of the flags and wander a distance from the brook. So that beneath the surface of the grass and under the screen of the leaves there are ten times more birds than are seen.

Besides the singing and calling, there is a peculiar sound which is only heard in summer. Waiting quietly to discover what birds are about, I become aware of a sound in the very air. It is not the midsummer hum which will soon be heard over the heated hay in the valley and over the cooler hills alike. It is not enough to be called a hum, and does but just tremble at the extreme edge of hearing. If the branches wave and rustle they overbear it; the buzz of a passing bee is so much louder it overcomes all of it that is in the whole field. I cannot define it, except by calling the hours of winter to mind—they are silent; you hear a branch crack or creak as it rubs another in the wood, you hear the hoar-frost crunch on the grass beneath your feet, but the air is without sound in itself. The sound of summer is everywhere—in the passing breeze, in the hedge, in the broad-branching trees, in the grass as it swings; all the myriad particles that together make the summer are in motion. The sap moves in the trees, the pollen is pushed out from grass and flower, and yet again these acres and acres of leaves and square miles of grass-blades—for they would cover acres and square miles if reckoned edge to edge—are drawing their strength from the atmosphere. Exceedingly minute as these vibrations must be, their numbers perhaps may give them a volume almost reaching in the aggregate to the power of the ear. Besides the quivering leaf, the swinging grass, the fluttering bird's wing, and the thousand oval membranes which

innumerable insects whirl about, a faint resonance seems to come from the very earth itself. The fervour of the sunbeams descending in a tidal flood rings on the strung harp of earth. It is this exquisite undertone, heard and yet unheard, which brings the mind into sweet accordance with the wonderful instrument of nature.

By the apple tree there is a low bank, where the grass is less tall and admits the heat direct to the ground; here there are blue flowers—bluer than the wings of my favourite butterflies—with white centres—the lovely bird's-eyes, or veronica. The violet and cowslip, bluebell and rose, are known to thousands; the veronica is overlooked. The ploughboys know it, and the wayside children, the mower and those who linger in fields, but few else. Brightly blue and surrounded by greenest grass, imbedded in and all the more blue for the shadow of the grass, these growing butterflies' wings draw to themselves the sun. From this island I look down into the depth of the grasses. Red sorrel spires—deep drinkers of reddest sun wine—stand the boldest, and in their numbers threaten the buttercups. To these in the distance they give the gipsy-gold tint—the reflection of fire on plates of the precious metal. It will show even on a ring by firelight; blood in the gold, they say. Gather the open marguerite daisies, and they seem large—so wide a disc, such fingers of rays; but in the grass their size is toned by so much green. Clover heads of honey lurk in the bunches and by the hidden footpath. Like clubs from Polynesia, the tips of the grasses are varied in shape: some tend to a point—the foptails—some are hard and cylindrical; others, avoiding the club shape, put forth the slenderest branches with fruit of seed at the ends, which tremble as the air goes by. Their stalks are ripening and becoming of the colour of hay while yet the long blades remain green.

Each kind is repeated a hundred times, the foxtails are succeeded by foxtails, the narrow blades by narrow blades, but never become monotonous; sorrel stands by sorrel, daisy flowers by daisy. This bed of veronica at the foot of the ancient apple has a whole handful of flowers, and yet they do not weary the eye. Oak follows oak and elm ranks with elm, but the woodlands are pleasant; however many times reduplicated, their beauty only increases. So, too, the summer days; the sun rises on the same grasses and green hedges, there is the same blue sky, but did we ever have enough of them? No, not in a hundred years! There seems always a depth somewhere unexplored, a thicket that has not been seen through, a corner full of ferns, a quaint old hollow tree, which may give us something. Bees go by me as I stand under the apple, but they pass on for the most part bound on a long journey, across to the clover fields or up to the thyme lands; only a few go down into the mowing grass. The hive bees are the most impatient of insects; they cannot bear to entangle their wings beating against grasses or boughs. Not one will enter a hedge. They like an open and level surface, places cropped by sheep, the sward by the roadside, fields of clover, where the flower is not deep under grass.

## II.

It is the patient humble bee that goes down into the forest of the mowing grass. If entangled, the humble bee climbs up a sorrel stem and takes wing, without any sign of annoyance. His broad back with tawny bar buoyantly glides over the golden buttercups. He hums to himself as he goes, so happy is he. He knows no skep, no cunning work in glass receives his labour, no artificial saccharine aids him when the beams of the sun are cold, there is no

step to be taken - that he may shoot at comfort, the way is not made clear for him that he may start straight for the flowers, nor are any - can not him. He has no shelter if the storm descends suddenly; but he has one of trusted straw well thatched and tiled to retreat to. The lurching bird, with a kick like a crooked iron nail, drives him to the ground, and leaves him pierced with a thorn; but no hail of shot revenges his torture. The grass stiffens at nightfall (in autumn), and he must creep when he may, if possibly he may escape the frost. No one cares for the humble bee. But down to the flowering nettle in the mossy-sided ditch, up into the tall elm, winding in and out and round the branched buttercups, along the banks of the brook, far inside the deepest wood, away he wanders and despises nothing. His nest is under the rough grasses and the mosses of the mound, a mere tunnel beneath the fibres and matted surface. The hawthorn overhangs it, the fern grows by, red mice run the past.

It thunders, and the great oak trembles; the heavy rain drops through the treble roof of oak and hawthorn and fern. Under the arched branches the lightning plays along, swiftly to and fro, or seems to, like the swish of a whip, a yellowish-red against the green; a boom! a crackle as if a tree fell from the sky. The thick grasses are bowed, the white florets of the wild parsley are beaten down, the rain hurls itself, and suddenly a fierce blast tears the green oak leaves and whirls them out into the fields; but the humble bee's home, under moss and matted fibres, remains uninjured. His house at the root of the king of trees, like a cave in the rock, is safe. The storm passes and the sun comes out, the air is the sweeter and the richer for the rain, like verses with a rhyme; there will be more honey in the flowers. Humble he is, but wild; always in the field, the wood; always by the banks and thickets; always wild and humming to his flowers.

Therefore I like the humble bee, being, at heart at least, for ever roaming among the woodlands and the hills and by the brooks. In such quick summer storms the lightning gives the impression of being far more dangerous than the zigzag paths traced on the autumn sky. The electric cloud seems almost level with the ground and the livid flame to rush to and fro beneath the boughs as the little bats do in the evening.

Caught by such a cloud, I have stayed under thick larches at the edge of plantations. They are no shelter, but conceal one perfectly. The wood pigeons come home to their nest-trees; in larches they seem to have permanent nests, almost like rooks. Kestrels, too, come home to the wood. Pheasants crow, but not from fear—from defiance; in fear they scream. The boom startles them, and they instantly defy the sky. The rabbits quietly feed on out in the field between the thistles and rushes that so often grow in woodside pastures, quietly hopping to their favourite places, utterly heedless how heavy the echoes may be in the hollows of the wooded hills. Till the rain comes they take no heed whatever, but then make for shelter. Blackbirds often make a good deal of noise; but the soft turtle doves coo gently, let the lightning be as savage as it will. Nothing has the least fear. So trustful are the doves, the squirrels, the birds of the branches, and the creatures of the field. Under their tuition let us rid ourselves of mental terrors, and face death itself as calmly as they do the livid lightning; so trustful and so content with their fate, resting in themselves and unappalled. If but by reason and will I could reach the godlike calm and courage of what we so thoughtlessly call the timid turtle dove, I should lead a nearly perfect life.

The bark of the ancient apple tree under which I have been standing is shrunken like iron which has been

heated and let cool round the rim of a wheel. For a hundred years the horses have rubbed against it while feeding in the aftermath. The scales of the bark are gone or smoothed down and level, so that insects have no hiding place. There are no crevices for them, the horse-hairs that were caught anywhere have been carried away by birds for their nests. The trunk is smooth and columnar, hard as iron. A hundred times the mowing grass has grown up around it, the birds have built their nests, the butterflies fluttered by, and the acorns dropped from the oaks. It is a long, long time, counted by artificial hours or by the seasons, but it is longer still in another way. The greenfinch in the hawthorn yonder has been there since I came out, and all the time has been happily talking to his love. He has left the hawthorn indeed, but only for a minute or two, to fetch a few seeds, and comes back each time more full of song-talk than ever. He notes no slow movement of the oak's shadow on the grass; it is nothing to him and his lady dear that the sun, as seen from his nest, is crossing from one great bough of the oak to another. The dew even in the deepest and most tangled grass has long since been dried, and some of the flowers that close at noon will shortly fold their petals. The morning airs, which breathe so sweetly, come less and less frequently as the heat increases. Vanishing from the sky, the last fragments of cloud have left an untarnished azure. Many times the bees have returned to their hives, and thus the index of the day advances. It is nothing to the greenfinches; all their thoughts are in their song-talk. The sunny moment is to them all in all. So deeply are they rapt in it that they do not know whether it is a moment or a year. There is no clock for feeling, for joy, for love.

And with all their motions and stepping from bough to bough, they are not restless; they have so much time,

you see. So, too, the whitethroat in the wild parsley; so, too, the thrush that just now peered out and partly fluttered his wings as he stood to look. A butterfly comes and stays on a leaf—a leaf much warmed by the sun—and shuts his wings. In a minute he opens them, shuts them again, half wheels round, and by and by—just when he chooses, and not before—floats away. The flowers open, and remain open for hours, to the sun. Hastelessness is the only word one can make up to describe it; there is much rest, but no haste. Each moment, as with the greenfinches, is so full of life that it seems so long and so sufficient in itself. Not only the days, but life itself lengthens in summer. I would spread abroad my arms and gather more of it to me, could I do so.

All the procession of living and growing things passes. The grass stands up taller and still taller, the sheaths open, and the stalk arises, the pollen clings till the breeze sweeps it. The bees rush past, and the resolute wasps; the humble bees, whose weight swings them along. About the oaks and maples the brown chafers swarm, and the fern-owls at dusk, and the blackbirds and jays by day, cannot reduce their legions while they last. Yellow butterflies, and white, broad red admirals, and sweet blues; think of the kingdom of flowers which is theirs! Heavy moths burring at the edge of the copse; green, and red, and gold flies; gnats, like smoke, around the tree tops; midges so thick over the brook, as if you could haul a netful; tiny leaping creatures in the grass; bronze beetles across the path; blue dragonflies pondering on cool leaves of water-plantain. Blue jays flitting, a magpie drooping across from elm to elm; young rooks that have escaped the hostile shot blundering up into the branches; missel-thrushes leading their fledgelings, already strong on the wing, from field to field. An egg here on the



but a bird could find space to drink. So down again from this sun of Spain to woody coverts where the wild hops are blocking every avenue, and green-flowered bryony would fain climb to the trees; where grey-flecked ivy winds spirally about the red rugged bark of pines, where burdocks fight for the footpath, and teasle-heads look over the low hedges. Brake-fern rises five feet high; in some way woodpeckers are associated with brake, and there seem more of them where it flourishes. If you count the depth and strength of its roots in the loamy sand, add the thickness of its flattened stem, and the width of its branching fronds, you may say that it comes near to be a little tree. Beneath where the ponds are bushy mare's-tails grow, and on the moist banks jointed pewterwort; some of the broad bronze leaves of water-weeds seem to try and conquer the pond and cover it so firmly that a wagtail may run on them. A white butterfly follows along the waggon road, the pheasants slip away as quietly as the butterfly flies, but a jay screeches loudly and flutters in high rage to see us. Under an ancient garden wall, among matted bines of trumpet convolvulus, there is a hedge-sparrow's nest overhung with ivy on which even now the last black berries cling.

There are minute white flowers on the top of the wall, out of reach, and lichen grows against it dried by the sun till it looks ready to crumble. By the gateway grows a thick bunch of meadow geranium, soon to flower; over the gate is the dusty highway road, quiet but dusty, dotted with the innumerable footmarks of a flock of sheep that has passed. The sound of their bleating still comes back, and the bees driven up by their feet have hardly had time to settle again on the white clover beginning to flower on the short roadside sward. All the hawthorn leaves and brier and bramble, the honeysuckle, too, is gritty with the dust that has been scattered upon it. But see—can it

be? Stretch a hand high, quick, and reach it down; the first, the sweetest, the dearest rose of June. Not yet expected, for the time is between the may and the roses, least of all here in the hot and dusty highway; but it is found—the first rose of June.

Straight go the white petals to the heart; straight the mind's glance goes back to how many other pageants of summer in old times! When perchance the sunny days were even more sunny; when the stilly oaks were full of mystery, lurking like the Druid's mistletoe in the midst of their mighty branches. A glamour in the heart came back to it again from every flower; as the sunshine was reflected from them so the feeling in the heart returned tenfold. To the dreamy summer haze love gave a deep enchantment, the colours were fairer, the blue more lovely in the lucid sky. Each leaf finer, and the gross earth enamelled beneath the feet. A sweet breath on the air, a soft warm hand in the touch of the sunshine, a glance in the gleam of the rippled waters, a whisper in the dance of the shadows. The ethereal haze lifted the heavy oaks and they were buoyant on the mead, the rugged bark was chastened and no longer rough, each slender flower beneath them again refined. There was a presence everywhere though unseen, on the open hills, and not shut out under the dark pines. Dear were the June roses then because for another gathered. Yet even dearer now with so many years as it were upon the petals; all the days that have been before, all the heart-throbs, all our hopes lie in this opened bud. Let not the eyes grow dim, look not back but forward; the soul must uphold itself like the sun. Let us labour to make the heart grow larger as we become older, as the spreading oak gives more shelter. That we could but take to the soul some of the greatness and the beauty of the summer!

Still the pageant moves. The song-talk of the finches

clover is not to be written; acre upon acre, and not one spot of green, as if all the green had been planed away, leaving only the flowers to which the bees come by the thousand from far and near. But one white campion stands in the midst of the lake of yellow. The field is scented as though a hundred hives of honey had been emptied on it. Along the mound by it the bluebells are seeding, the hedge has been cut and the ground is strewn with twigs. Among those seeding bluebells and dry twigs and mosses I think a titlark has his nest, as he stays all day there and in the oak over. The pale clear yellow of charlock, sharp and clear, promises the finches bushels of seed for their young. Under the scarlet of the poppies the larks run, and then for change of colour soar into the blue. Creamy honeysuckle on the hedge around the corn field, buds of wild rose everywhere, but no sweet petal yet. Yonder, where the wheat can climb no higher up the slope, are the purple heath-bells, thyme and fitting stonechats.

The lone barn shut off by acres of barley is noisy with sparrows. It is their city, and there is a nest in every crevice, almost under every tile. Sometimes the partridges run between the ricks, and when the bats come out of the roof, leverets play in the waggon track. At even a fern-owl beats by, passing close to the eaves whence the moths issue. On the narrow waggon track which descends along a coombe and is worn in chalk, the heat pours down by day as if an invisible lens in the atmosphere focussed the sun's rays. Strong woody knapweed endures it, so do toadflax and pale blue scabious, and wild mignonette. The very sun of Spain burns and burns and ripens the wheat on the edge of the coombe, and will only let the spring moisten a yard or two around it; but there a few rushes have sprung, and in the water itself brooklime with blue flowers grows so thickly that nothing

the violet, all the bluebells and cowslips could not; make a spring; and without the blackbird, even the nightingale would be but half welcome. It is not yet noon, these songs have been ceaseless since dawn; this evening, after the yellowhammer has sung the sun down, when the moon rises and the faint stars appear, still the cuckoo will call, and the grasshopper lark, the landrail's "crake, crake" will echo from the mound, a warbler or a blackcap will utter his notes, and even at the darkest of the summer night the swallows will hardly sleep in their nests. As the morning sky grows blue, an hour before the sun, up will rise the larks, singing and audible now, the cuckoo will recommence, and the swallows will start again on their tireless journey. So that the songs of the summer birds are as ceaseless as the sound of the waterfall which plays day and night.

I cannot leave it; I must stay under the old tree in the midst of the long grass, the luxury of the leaves, and the song in the very air. I seem as if I could feel all the glowing life the sunshine gives and the south wind calls to being. The endless grass, the endless leaves, the immense strength of the oak expanding, the unalloyed joy of finch and blackbird; from all of them I receive a little. Each gives me something of the pure joy they gather for themselves. In the blackbird's melody one note is mine; in the dance of the leaf-shadows the formed maze is for me, though the motion is theirs; the flowers with a thousand faces have collected the kisses of the morning. Feeling with them, I receive some, at least, of their fulness of life. Never could I have enough; never stay long enough—whether here or whether lying on the shorter sward under the sweeping and graceful birches, or on the thyme-scented hills. Hour after hour, and still not enough. Or walking, the footpath was never long enough, nor my strength sufficient to endure till the mind

was weary. The exceeding beauty of the earth, in her splendour of life, yields a new thought with every petal. The hours when the mind is absorbed by beauty are the only hours when we really live, so that the longer we can stay among these things so much the more is snatched from inevitable Time. Let the shadow advance upon the dial—I can watch it with equanimity while it is there to be watched. It is only when the shadow is *not* there, when the clouds of winter cover it, that the dial is terrible. The invisible shadow goes on and steals from us. But now, while I can see the shadow of the tree and watch it slowly gliding along the surface of the grass, it is mine. These are the only hours that are not wasted—these hours that absorb the soul and fill it with beauty. This is real life, and all else is illusion, or mere endurance. Does this reverie of flowers and waterfall and song form an ideal, a human ideal, in the mind? It does; much the same ideal that Phidias sculptured of man and woman filled with a godlike sense of the violet fields of Greece, beautiful beyond thought, calm as my turtle dove before the lurid lightning of the unknown. To be beautiful and calm, without mental fear, is the ideal of nature. If I cannot achieve it, at least I can think it.

## MEADOW THOUGHTS.

THE old house stood by the silent country road, secluded by many a long, long mile, and yet again secluded within the great walls of the garden. Often and often I rambled up to the milestone which stood under an oak, to look at the chipped inscription low down—"To London, 79 Miles." So far away, you see, that the very inscription

risers and sinks like the tinkle of a waterfall. The greenfinches have been by me all the while. A bullfinch pipes now and then further up the hedge where the brambles and thorns are thickest. Boldest of birds to look at, he is always in hiding. The shrill tone of a goldfinch came just now from the ash branches, but he has gone on. Every four or five minutes a chaffinch sings close by, and another fills the interval near the gateway. There are linnets somewhere, but I cannot from the old apple tree fix their exact place. Thrushes have sung and ceased; they will begin again in ten minutes. The blackbirds do not cease; the note uttered by a blackbird in the oak yonder before it can drop is taken up by a second near the top of the field, and ere it falls is caught by a third on the left-hand side. From one of the topmost boughs of an elm there fell the song of a willow-warbler for awhile; one of the least of birds, he often seeks the highest branches of the highest tree.

A yellowhammer has just flown from a bare branch in the gateway, where he has been perched and singing a full hour. Presently he will commence again, and as the sun declines will sing him to the horizon, and then again sing till nearly dusk. The yellowhammer is almost the longest of all the singers; he sits and sits and has no inclination to move. In the spring he sings, in the summer he sings, and he continues when the last sheaves are being carried from the wheat field. The redstart yonder has given forth a few notes, the whitethroat flings himself into the air at short intervals and chatters, the shrike calls sharp and determined, faint but shrill calls descend from the swifts in the air. These descend, but the twittering notes of the swallows do not reach so far—they are too high to-day. A cuckoo has called by the brook, and now fainter from a greater distance. That the titlarks are singing I know, but not within hearing

from here; a dove, though, is audible, and a chiffchaff has twice passed. Afar beyond the oaks at the top of the field dark specks ascend from time to time, and after moving in wide circles for a while descend again to the corn. These must be larks; but their notes are not powerful enough to reach me, though they would were it not for the song in the hedges, the hum of innumerable insects, and the ceaseless "crake, crake" of landrails. There are at least two landrails in the mowing grass; one of them just now seemed coming straight towards the apple tree, and I expected in a minute to see the grass move, when the bird turned aside and entered the tufts and wild parsley by the hedge. Thence the call has come without a moment's pause, "crake, crake," till the thick hedge seems filled with it. Tits have visited the apple tree over my head, a wren has sung in the willow, or rather on a dead branch projecting lower down than the leafy boughs, and a robin across under the elms in the opposite hedge. Elms are a favourite tree of robins—not the upper branches, but those that grow down the trunk, and are the first to have leaves in spring.

The yellowhammer is the most persistent individually, but I think the blackbirds when listened to are the masters of the fields. Before one can finish another begins, like the summer ripples succeeding behind each other, so that the melodious sound merely changes its position. Now here, now in the corner, then across the field, again in the distant copse, where it seems about to sink, when it rises again almost at hand. Like a great human artist, the blackbird makes no effort, being fully conscious that his liquid tone cannot be matched. He utters a few delicious notes, and carelessly quits the green stage of the oak till it pleases him to sing again. Without the blackbird, in whose throat the sweetness of the green fields dwells, the days would be only partly summer. Without

was cut at the foot of the stone, since no one would be likely to want that information. It was half hidden by docks and nettles, despised and unnoticed. A broad land thus seventy-nine miles—how many meadows and corn fields, hedges and woods, in that distance?—wide enough to seclude any house, to hide it, like an acorn in the grass. Those who have lived all their lives in remote places do not feel the remoteness. No one else seemed to be conscious of the breadth that separated the place from the great centre, but it was, perhaps, that consciousness which deepened the solitude to me. It made the silence more still; the shadows of the oaks yet slower in their movement; everything more earnest. To convey a full impression of the intense concentration of Nature in the meadows is very difficult—everything is so utterly oblivious of man's thought and man's heart. The oaks stand—quiet, still—so still that the lichen loves them. At their feet the grass grows, and heeds nothing. Among it the squirrels leap, and their little hearts are as far away from you or me as the very wood of the oaks. The sunshine settles itself in the valley by the brook, and abides there whether we come or not. Glance through the gap in the hedge by the oak, and see how concentrated it is—all of it, every blade of grass, and leaf, and flower, and living creature, finch or squirrel. It is mesmerised upon itself. Then I used to feel that it really was seventy-nine miles to London, and not an hour or two only by rail, really all those miles. A great, broad province of green furrow and ploughed furrow between the old house and the city of the world. Such solace and solitude seventy-nine miles thick cannot be painted; the trees cannot be placed far enough away in perspective. It is necessary to stay in it like the oaks to know it.

Lime tree branches overhung the corner of the garden wall, whence a view was easy of the silent and dusty road,



till overarching oaks concealed it. The white dust heated by the sunshine, the green hedges, and the heavily massed trees, white clouds rolled together in the sky, a footpath opposite lost in the fields, as you might thrust a stick into the grass, tender lime leaves caressing the cheek, and silence. That is, the silence of the fields. If a breeze rustled the boughs, if a greenfinch called, if the cart mare in the meadow shook herself, making the earth and air tremble by her with the convulsion of her mighty muscles, these were not sounds, they were the silence itself. So sensitive to it as I was, in its turn it held me firmly, like the fabled spells of old time. The mere touch of a leaf was a talisman to bring me under the enchantment, so that I seemed to feel and know all that was proceeding among the grass blades and in the bushes. Among the lime trees along the wall the birds never built, though so close and sheltered. They built everywhere but there. To the broad coping-stones of the wall under the lime boughs speckled thrushes came almost hourly, sometimes to peer out and reconnoitre if it was safe to visit the garden, sometimes to see if a snail had climbed up the ivy. Then they dropped quietly down into the long strawberry patch immediately under. The cover of strawberries is the constant resource of all creeping things; the thrushes looked round every plant and under every leaf and runner. One toad always resided there, often two, and as you gathered a ripe strawberry you might catch sight of his black eye watching you take the fruit he had saved for you.

Down the road skims an eave swallow, swift as an arrow, his white back making the sun-dried dust dull and dingy; he is seeking a pool for mortar, and will waver to and fro by the brook below till he finds a convenient place to alight. Thence back to the eave here, where for forty years he and his ancestors built in safety. Two white

butterflies fluttering round each other rise over the lines, once more up over the house, and soar on till their white shows no longer against the illumined air. A grasshopper calls on the sward by the strawberries, and immediately fillips himself over seven leagues of grass blades. Yonder a line of men and women file across the field, seen for a moment as they pass a gateway, and the hay changes from hay-colour to green behind them as they turn the under but still sappy side upwards. They are working hard, but it looks easy, slow, and sunny. Finches fly out from the hedgerow to the overturned hay. Another butterfly, a brown one, floats along the dusty road—the only traveller yet. The white clouds are slowly passing behind the oaks, large puffed clouds, like deliberate loads of hay, leaving little wisps and flecks behind them caught in the sky. How pleasant it would be to read in the shadow! There is a broad shadow on the sward by the strawberries cast by a tall and fine-grown American crab tree. The very place for a book; and although I know it is useless, yet I go and fetch one and dispose myself on the grass.

I can never read in summer out of doors. Though in shadow the bright light fills it, summer shadows are broadest daylight. The page is so white and hard, the letters so very black, the meaning and drift not quite intelligible, because neither eye nor mind will dwell upon it. Human thoughts and imaginings written down are pale and feeble in bright summer light. The eye wanders away, and rests more lovingly on greensward and green lime leaves. The mind wanders yet deeper and farther into the dreamy mystery of the azure sky. Once now and then, determined to write down that mystery and delicious sense while actually in it, I have brought out table and ink and paper, and sat there in the midst of the summer day. Three words, and where is the thought? Gone. The paper is so obviously paper, the

ink so evidently ink, the pen so stiff; all so inadequate. You want colour, flexibility, light, sweet low sound—all these to paint it and play it in music, at the same time you want something that will answer to and record in one touch the strong throb of life and the thought, or feeling, or whatever it is that goes out into the earth and sky and space, endless as a beam of light. The very shade of the pen on the paper tells you how utterly hopeless it is to express these things. There is the shade and the brilliant gleaming whiteness; now tell me in plain written words the simple contrast of the two. Not in twenty pages, for the bright light shows the paper in its common fibre-ground, coarse aspect, in its reality, not as a mind-tablet.

The delicacy and beauty of thought or feeling is so extreme that it cannot be inked in; it is like the green and blue of field and sky, of veronica flower and grass blade, which in their own existence throw light and beauty on each other, but in artificial colours repel. Take the table indoors again, and the book; the thoughts and imaginings of others are vain, and your own too deep to be written. For the mind is filled with the exceeding beauty of these things, and their great wondrousness and marvel. Never yet have I been able to write what I felt about the sunlight only. Colour and form and light are as magic to me. It is a trance. It requires a language of ideas to convey it. It is ten years since I last reclined on that grass plot, and yet I have been writing of it as if it was yesterday, and every blade of grass is as visible and as real to me now as then. They were greener towards the house, and more brown-tinted on the margin of the strawberry bed, because towards the house the shadow rested longest. By the strawberries the fierce sunlight burned them.

The sunlight put out the books I brought into it just

The little lawn beside the strawberry bed, burned brown there, and green towards the house shadow, holds how many myriad grass blades! Here they are all matted together, long, and dragging each other down. Part them, and beneath them are still more, overhung and hidden. The fibres are intertangled, woven in an endless basket-work and chaos of green and dried threads. A blamable profusion this; a fifth as many would be enough; altogether a wilful waste here. As for these insects that spring out of it as I press the grass, a hundredth part of them would suffice. The American crab tree is a snowy mount in spring; the flakes of bloom, when they fall, cover the grass with a film—a bushel of bloom, which the wind takes and scatters afar. The extravagance is sublime. The two little cherry trees are as wasteful; they throw away handfuls of flower; but in the meadows the careless, spendthrift ways of grass and flower and all things are not to be expressed. Seeds by the hundred million float with absolute indifference on the air. The oak has a hundred thousand more leaves than necessary, and never hides a single acorn. Nothing utilitarian—everything on a scale of splendid waste. Such noble, broadcast, open-armed waste is delicious to behold. Never was there such a lying proverb as “Enough is as good as a feast.” Give me the feast; give me squandered millions of seeds, luxurious carpets of petals, green mountains of oak leaves. The greater the waste, the greater the enjoyment—the nearer the approach to real life. Casuistry is of no avail; the fact is obvious; Nature flings treasures abroad, puffs them with open lips along on every breeze, piles up lavish layers of them in the free open air, packs countless numbers together in the needles of a fir tree. Prodigality and superfluity are stamped on everything she does. The ear of wheat returns a hundredfold the grain from which it grew. The surface of the earth offers to us far more than

we can consume—the grains, the seeds, the fruits, the animals, the abounding products are beyond the power of all the human race to devour. They can, too, be multiplied a thousandfold. There is no natural lack. Whenever there is lack among us it is from artificial causes, which intelligence should remove.

From the littleness, and meanness, and niggardliness forced upon us by circumstances, what a relief to turn aside to the exceeding plenty of Nature! There are no bounds to it, there is no comparison to parallel it, so great is this generosity. No physical reason exists why every human being should not have sufficient, at least, of necessities. For any human being to starve, or even to be in trouble about the procuring of simple food, appears, indeed, a strange and unaccountable thing, quite upside down, and contrary to sense, if you do but consider a moment the enormous profusion the earth throws at our feet. In the slow process of time, as the human heart grows larger, such provision, I sincerely trust, will be made that no one need ever feel anxiety about mere subsistence. Then, too, let there be some imitation of this open-handed generosity and divine waste. Let the generations to come feast free of care, like my finches on the seeds of the mowing grass, from which no voice drives them. If I could but give away as freely as the earth does!

The white-backed eave swallow has returned many, many times from the shallow drinking place by the brook to his half-built nest. Sometimes the pair of them cling to the mortar they have fixed under the eave, and twitter to each other about the progress of the work. They dive downwards with such velocity when they quit hold that it seems as if they must strike the ground, but they shoot up again, over the wall and the lime trees. A thrush has been to the arbour yonder twenty times; it

is made of crossed laths, and overgrown with "tea-plant," and the nest is inside the lathwork. A sparrow has visited the rose tree by the wall—the buds are covered with aphides. A brown tree-creeper has been to the limes, then to the cherries, and even to a stout lilac stem. No matter how small the tree, he tries all that are in his way. The bright colours of a bullfinch were visible a moment just now, as he passed across the shadows farther down the garden under the damson trees and into the bushes. The grasshopper has gone past and along the garden path, his voice is not heard now; but there is another coming. While I have been dreaming, all these and hundreds out in the meadow have been intensely happy. So concentrated on their little work in the sunshine, so intent on the tiny egg, on the insect captured on the grass tip to be carried to the eager fledgelings, so joyful in listening to the song poured out for them or in pouring it forth, quite oblivious of all else. It is in this intense concentration that they are so happy. If they could only live longer!—but a few such seasons for them—I wish they could live a hundred years just to feast on the seeds and sing and be utterly happy and oblivious of everything but the moment they are passing. A black line has rushed up from the espalier apple yonder to the housetop thirty times at least. The starlings fly so swiftly and so straight that they seem to leave a black line along the air. They have a nest in the roof, they are to and fro it and the meadow the entire day, from dawn till eve. The espalier apple, like a screen, hides the meadow from me, so that the descending starlings appear to dive into a space behind it. Sloping downwards the meadow makes a valley; I cannot see it, but know that it is golden with buttercups, and that a brook runs in the groove of it.

Afar yonder I can see a summit beyond where the

grass swells upwards to a higher level than this spot. There are bushes and elms whose height is decreased by distance on the summit, horses in the shadow of the trees, and a small flock of sheep crowded, as is their wont, in the hot and sunny gateway. By the side of the summit is a deep green trench, so it looks from here, in the hill-side: it is really the course of a streamlet worn deep in the earth. I can see nothing between the top of the espalier screen and the horses under the elms on the hill. But the starlings go up and down into the hollow space, which is aglow with golden buttercups, and, indeed, I am looking over a hundred finches eagerly searching, sweetly calling, happy as the summer day. A thousand thousand grasshoppers are leaping, thrushes are labouring, filled with love and tenderness, doves cooing—there is as much joy as there are leaves on the hedges. Faster than the starling's flight my mind runs up to the streamlet in the deep green trench beside the hill.

Pleasant it was to trace it upwards, narrowing at every ascending step, till the thin stream, thinner than fragile glass, did but merely slip over the stones. A little less and it could not have run at all, water could not stretch out to greater tenuity. It smoothed the brown growth on the stones, stroking it softly. It filled up tiny basins of sand, and ran out at the edges between minute rocks of flint. Beneath it went under thickest brooklime, blue flowered, and serrated water-parsnips, lost like many a mighty river for awhile among a forest of leaves. Higher up masses of bramble and projecting thorn stopped the explorer, who must wind round the grassy mound. Pausing to look back a moment there were meads under the hill with the shortest and greenest herbage, perpetually watered, and without a single buttercup, a strip of pure green among yellow flowers and yellowing corn. A few hollow oaks on whose boughs the cuckoos

stayed to call, two or three peewits coursing up and down, larks singing, and for all else silence. Between the wheat and the grassy mound the path was almost closed, burdocks and brambles thrust the adventurer outward to brush against the wheat-ears. Upwards till suddenly it turned, and led by steep notches in the bank, as it seemed down to the roots of the elm trees. The clump of elms grew right over a deep and rugged hollow; their branches reached out across it, roofing in the cave.

Here was the spring, at the foot of a perpendicular rock, moss-grown low down, and overrun with creeping ivy higher. Green thorn bushes filled the chinks and made a wall to the well, and the long narrow hart's-tongue streaked the face of the cliff. Behind the thick thorns hid the course of the streamlet, in front rose the solid rock, upon the right hand the sward came to the edge—it shook every now and then as the horses in the shade of the elms stamped their feet—on the left hand the ears of wheat peered over the verge. A rocky cell in concentrated silence of green things. Now and again a finch, a starling, or a sparrow would come meaning to drink—athirst from the meadow or the corn field—and start and almost entangle its wings in the bushes, so completely astonished that any one should be there. The spring rises in a hollow under the rock imperceptibly, and without bubble or sound. The fine sand of the shallow basin is undisturbed—no tiny water-volcano pushes up a dome of particles. Nor is there any crevice in the stone, but the basin is always full and always running over. As it slips from the brim a gleam of sunshine falls through the boughs and meets it. To this cell I used to come once now and then on a summer's day, tempted, perhaps, like the finches, by the sweet cool water, but drawn also by a feeling that could not be analyzed. Stooping, I lifted the water in the hollow of



my hand—carefully, lest the sand might be disturbed—and the sunlight gleamed on it as it slipped through my fingers. Alone in the green-roofed cave, alone with the sunlight and the pure water, there was a sense of something more than these. The water was more to me than water, and the sun than sun. The gleaming rays on the water in my palm held me for a moment, the touch of the water gave me something from itself. A moment, and the gleam was gone, the water flowing away, but I had had them. Beside the physical water and physical light I had received from them their beauty; they had communicated to me this silent mystery. The pure and beautiful water, the pure, clear, and beautiful light, each had given me something of their truth.

So many times I came to it, toiling up the long and shadowless hill in the burning sunshine, often carrying a vessel to take some of it home with me. There was a brook, indeed; but this was different, it was the spring; it was taken home as a beautiful flower might be brought. It is not the physical water, it is the sense or feeling that it conveys. Nor is it the physical sunshine; it is the sense of inexpressible beauty which it brings with it. Of such I still drink, and hope to do so still deeper.

## AUGUST THUNDER.

IN August the loveliest day is when the thunder booms far off at sea, while over the corn fields the sun shines with increased brilliance. The sky over the wheat is blue, but in the distance some large clouds stay motionless. The upper slopes of these mount-like vapours reflect the rays of the sun; beneath they melt away in an indefinite mist

which does not throw back the light. The massy ridges above have no foundation beneath, reaching to the horizon ; they do not threaten ; they add to the beauty of the level azure, as hills about a plain.

Rolling in from the south comes the wave of heavy sound, too distant to cause uneasiness—the boom of an immense breaker on the shore of heaven. After each burst the sun seems to glow fiercer, the warm haze thickens, the rich blue sky is richer, the insects in the air vibrate their wings more rapidly, and a shriller hum arises ; butterflies are busier, and in the wheat the reapers bend, cutting at the yellow straw.

Instead of uneasiness the thunder increases the sense of luxurious tropical sunlight, colour, and glowing life. All things appear aware that the lightning will not approach—it will remain miles at sea—and they throb and pant with pulses quickened by the discharge of electricity.

Two lovers were sitting on a green dry bank near a sundial, in the shade of a beech. Round spots of sunlight came through its branches and dotted the grass at their feet. Behind them there was a belt of beeches, on the right hand a thick and high yew hedge, on the left a great thicket of hawthorn trees ; so that they were enclosed on three sides, but in front the view was open. A square of greensward, raised like a terrace, was before them ; at its edge the ground dropped a few feet, and the meadows commenced. Far down the slope the brook passed, and beyond it were the corn fields, undulating away to the hills.

Meadow and brook, wheat fields and hills—a simple landscape, yet such as is not to be surpassed by any on the earth. A common landscape—there are hundreds such in our England—yet beyond compare. There are none like it elsewhere in the wide world.

Beyond the brook, in the rising field, reapers were labouring at the wheat; afar off the yellow slopes were scarce distinguishable in the August haze. It was one of those loveliest of August mornings when the idle thunder booms at sea.

The reapers were working hard in the dry, hot wheat, the straw warm to the touch, the earth warm beneath and opening in crevices with heat; a dry rustling of straw; a dry impalpable dust filling their throats. The days are long in August, but never long enough for the reapers.

On the greenish face of the sundial, weather-stained and tarnished, the shadow of the gnomon seemed to rest, so slowly moved the sun on his high summer circle. Love and Time were idle, but the reapers toiled in the corn.

Red berries and pink flowers were on the sprays of the brambles that thrust forth from the thicket of hawthorn. There were nuts on the hazel rods among the hawthorns, and along the edge of the grass discs of knapweed, and yellow bedstraw, and purple vetch. Where the terrace sloped to the meadow two or three harebells drooped; the light air scarcely swung them.

Butterflies, whose blue wings were edged with another blue, came up the terrace and fluttered along its verge. Bees visited the clover still flowering in the long grass. In the air, invisible, many thousand insect-wings vibrating beat it to a continuous hum.

The light feet of squirrels in the beeches and among the ferns and moss scarcely made a rustle, unless they moved a dry leaf; the rushing of the water over the hatch at the trout pond farther away now lifted itself and now decreased, the sound floated among the tree trunks. As the dry, warm air came from the corn the round dots of sunlight shot to and fro on the sward, following the leaves above.

A fervour of heat and light glowed in the atmosphere

and was caught and held in the haze. Over the beech trees the blue shone with light. Rolling along, the boom from the sea passed like a great organ-note, and the earth and air, the grass and living things responded; the light was yet more brilliant, the colours yet more warm; the earth offered the fulness of the harvest.

There came the low boom of the distant thunder; but the hills slumbered, and the clouds were still. The reapers laboured in the corn.

The rolling boom of the thunder came through the fields of light, the earth glowed warmer.

The reapers laboured cutting at the wheat, and with bowed backs bound up the sheaves; the doves came out from the copse and fed among the stubble. Among the beech trees there floated the sound of the falling water on its way to the cool green flags of the brook. Faint rustling of squirrels' feet, the hum of invisible insects, the flutter of butterflies' wings, the hum of a humble bee wandering among the fern, the call of the grasshoppers in the grass, the amorous sigh of the breeze, the quick maze of the sunlight dots, the sense of all summer things, the distant thunder deepening with the pressure of its note the voices of the sunlit earth, the fulness of the harvest, the touch of a loving hand.

## WHEAT FIELDS NEAR LONDON.

THE corn fields immediately without London on the southern side are among the first to be reaped. Regular as if clipped to a certain height, the level wheat shows the slope of the ground, corresponding to it, so that the glance travels swiftly and unchecked across the fields.

They scarce seem divided, for the yellow ears on either side rise as high as the cropped hedge between.

Red spots, like larger poppies, now appear above and now dive down again beneath the golden surface. These are the red caps worn by some of the reapers; some of the girls, too, have a red scarf across the shoulder or round the waist. By instinctive sympathy the heat of summer requires the contrast of brilliant hues, of scarlet and gold, of poppy and wheat.

A girl, as she rises from her stooping position, turns a face, brown as if stained with walnut juice, towards me, the plain gold ring in her brown ear gleams, so, too, the rings on her finger, nearly black from the sun, but her dark eyes scarcely pause a second on a stranger. She is too busy, her tanned fingers are at work again gathering up the cut wheat. This is no gentle labour, but "hard hand-play," like that in the battle of the olden time sung by the Saxon poet.

The ceaseless stroke of the reaping-hook falls on the ranks of the corn: the corn yields, but only inch by inch. If the burning sun, or thirst, or weariness, forces the reaper to rest, the fight too stays, the ranks do not retreat, and victory is only won by countless blows. The boom of a bridge as a train rolls over the iron girders resounds, and the brazen dome on the locomotive is visible for a moment as it passes across the valley. But no one heeds it—the train goes on its way to the great city, the reapers abide by their labour. Men and women, lads and girls, some mere children, judged by their stature, are plunged as it were in the wheat.

The few that wear bright colours are seen: the many who do not are unnoticed. Perhaps the dusky girl here with the red scarf may have some strain of the gipsy, some far-off reminiscence of the sunlit East which caused her to wind it about her. The sheaf grows under her

fingers, it is bound about with a girdle of twisted stalks, in which mingle the green bine of convolvulus and the pink-streaked bells that must fade.

Heat comes down from above; heat comes up from beneath—from the dry, white earth, from the rows of stubble, as if emitted by the endless tubes of cut stalks pointing upwards. Wheat is a plant of the sun: it loves the heat, and heat crackles in the rustle of the straw. The pimpernels above which the hook passed are wide open; the larger white convolvulus trumpets droop languidly on the low hedge: the distant hills are dim with the vapour of heat; the very clouds which stay motionless in the sky reflect a yet more brilliant light from their white edges. Is there no shadow?

There is no tree in the field, and the low hedge can shelter nothing; but bordering the next, on rather higher ground, is an ash copse, with some few spruce firs. As I rest on a rail in the shadow of these firs, a light air now and again draws along beside the nut tree bushes of the hedge, the cooler atmosphere of the shadow perhaps causes it. Faint as it is, it sways the heavy-laden brome grass, but it is not strong enough to lift a ball of thistle-down from the bennets among which it is entangled.

How swiftly the much-desired summer comes upon us! Even with the reapers at work before one it is difficult to realize that it has not only come, but will soon be passing away. Sweet summer is but just long enough for the happy loves of the larks. It seems but yesterday, it is really more than five months since, that leaning against the gate there, I watched a lark and his affianced on the ground among the grey stubble of last year still standing.

His crest was high, and his form upright; he ran a little way and then sang, went on again and sang again to his love, who moved parallel with him. Then passing from

the old dead stubble to fresh-turned furrows, still they went side by side, now down in the valley between the clods, now mounting the ridges, but always together, always with song and joy, till I lost them across the brown earth. But even then from time to time came the sweet voice, full of hope in coming summer.

The day declined, and from the clear, cold sky of March the moon looked down, gleaming on the smooth planed furrow where the plough had passed. Scarce had she faded in the dawn ere the lark sang again, high in the morning sky. The evenings became dark; still he rose above the shadows and the dusky earth, and his song fell from the bosom of the night. With full untiring choir the joyous host heralded the birth of the corn; the slender, forceless seed leaves which came gently up till they had risen above the proud crests of the lovers.

Time advanced, and the bare mounds about the field, carefully cleaned by the husbandman, were covered again with wild herbs and plants, like a fringe to a garment of pure green. Parsley and "gix," and clogweed, and saucelone, whose white flowers smell of garlie if crushed in the fingers, came up along the hedge; by the gateway from the bare trodden earth appeared the shepherd's purse; small must be the coin to go in its seed capsule, and therefore it was so called with grim and truthful humour, for the shepherd, hard as is his work, facing wind and weather, carries home but little money.

Yellow charlock shot up faster and shone bright above the corn; the oaks showered down their green flowers like moss upon the ground; the tree pipits sang on the branches and descended to the wheat. The rusty chain-harrow, lying inside the gate, all tangled together, was concealed with grasses. Yonder the magpies fluttered over the beans among which they are always searching in spring; blackbirds, too, are fond of a bean field.

Time advanced again, and afar on the slope bright yellow mustard flowered, a hill of yellow behind the elms. The luxuriant purple of trifolium, acres of rich colour, glowed in the sunlight. There was a scent of flowering beans, the vetches were in flower, and the peas which clung together for support—the stalk of the pea goes through the leaf as the painter thrusts his thumb through his palette. Under the edge of the footpath through the wheat a wild pansy blooms.

Standing in the gateway beneath the shelter of the elms as the clouds come over, it is pleasant to hear the cool refreshing rain come softly down; the green wheat drinks it as it falls, so that hardly a drop reaches the ground, and to-morrow it will be as dry as ever. Wood pigeons call from the hedges, and blackbirds whistle in the trees; the sweet delicious rain refreshes them as it does the corn.

Thunder mutters in the distance, and the electric atmosphere rapidly draws the wheat up higher. A few days' sunshine and the first wheat ear appears. Very likely there are others near, but standing with their hood of green leaf towards you, and therefore hidden. As the wheat comes into ear it is garlanded about with hedges in full flower.

It is midsummer, and midsummer, like a bride, is decked in white. On the high-reaching briers white June roses; white flowers on the lowly brambles; broad white umbels of elder in the corner, and white cornels blooming under the elm; honeysuckle hanging creamy-white coronals round the ash boughs; white meadow-sweet flowering on the shore of the ditch; white clover, too, beside the gateway. As spring is azure and purple, so midsummer is white, and autumn golden. Thus the coming out of the wheat into ear is marked and welcomed with the purest colour.



But these, though the most prominent along the hedge, are not the only flowers; the prevalent white is embroidered with other hues. The brown feathers of a few reeds growing where the furrows empty the showers into the ditch, wave above the corn. Among the leaves of mallow its mauve petals are sheltered from the sun. On slender stalks the yellow vetchling blooms, reaching ambitiously as tall as the lowest of the brambles. Bird's-foot lotus, with red claws, is overtopped by the grasses.

The elm has a fresh green—it has put forth its second or midsummer shoot; the young leaves of the aspen are white, and the tree as the wind touches it seems to turn grey. The furrows run to the ditch under the reeds, the ditch declines to a little streamlet which winds all hidden by willow-herb and rush and flag, a mere trickle of water under brooklime, away at the feet of the corn. In the shadow, deep down beneath the crumbling bank which is only held up by the roots of the grasses, is a forget-me-not, with a tiny circlet of yellow in the centre of its petals.

The coming of the ears of wheat forms an era and a date, a fixed point in the story of the summer. It is then that, soon after dawn, the clear sky assumes the delicate and yet luscious purple which seems to shine through the usual atmosphere, as if its former blue became translucent, and an inner and ethereal light of colour was shown. As the sun rises higher the brilliance of his rays overpowers it, and even at midsummer it is but rarely seen.

The morning sky is often, too, charged with saffron, or the blue is clear but pale, and the sunrise might be watched for many mornings without the appearance of this exquisite hue. Once seen, it will ever be remembered. Upon the Downs in early autumn, as the vapours clear

away, the same colour occasionally gleams from the narrow openings of blue sky. But at midsummer, above the opening wheat ears, the heaven from the east to the zenith is flushed with it.

At noonday, as the light breeze comes over, the wheat rustles the more because the stalks are stiffening and swing from side to side from the root instead of yielding up the stem. Stay now at every gateway and lean over while the midsummer hum sounds above. It is a peculiar sound, not like the querulous buzz of the honey bee nor the drone of the humble bee, but a sharp ringing resonance like that of a tuning-fork. Sometimes, in the far-away country where it is often much louder, the folk think it has a threatening note.

Here the barley has taken a different tint now the beard is out; here the oats are straggling forth from their sheath; here a pungent odour of mustard in flower comes on the air; there a poppy faints with broad petals flung back and drooping, unable to uphold its gorgeous robes. The flower of the field pea, here again, would make a model for a lady's hat; so would a butterfly with closed wings on the verge of a leaf; so would the broom blossom, or the pink flower of the restharrow. This hairy caterpillar, creeping along the hawthorn, which if touched, immediately coils itself in a ring, very recently was thought a charm in distant country places for some diseases of childhood, if hung about the neck. Hedge mustard, yellow and ragged and dusty, stands by the gateway.

In the evening, as the dew gathers on the grass, which feels cooler to the hand some time before an actual deposit, the clover and vetches close their leaves—the signal the hares have been waiting for to venture from the sides of the fields where they have been cautiously roaming, and take bolder strolls across the open and

along the lanes. The aspens rustle louder in the stillness of the evening; their leaves not only sway to and fro, but semi-rotate upon the stalks, which causes their scintillating appearance. The stars presently shine from the pale blue sky, and the wheat shimmers dimly white beneath them

So time advances, till to-day, watching the reapers from the shadow of the copse, it seems as if within that golden expanse there must be something hidden, could you but rush in and seize it—some treasure of the sunshine; and there is a treasure, the treasure of life stored in those little grains, the slow product of the sun. But it cannot be grasped in an impatient moment—it must be gathered with labour. I have threshed out in my hand three ears of the ripe wheat: how many foot-pounds of human energy do these few light grains represent?

The roof of the Crystal Palace yonder gleams and sparkles this afternoon as if it really were crystal under the bright rays. But it was concealed by mist when the ploughs in the months gone by were guided in these furrows by men, hard of feature and of hand, stooping to their toil. The piercing east wind scattered the dust in clouds, looking at a distance like small rain across the field, when grey-coated men, grey too of beard, followed the red drill to and fro.

How many times the horses stayed in this sheltered corner while the ploughmen and their lads ate their crusts! How many times the farmer and the bailiff, with hands behind their backs, considering, walked along the hedge taking counsel of the earth if they had done right! How many times hard gold and silver was paid over at the farmer's door for labour while yet the plant was green! How many considering cups of ale were emptied in planning out the future harvest:

Now it is come, and still more labour—look at the reapers yonder—and after that more time and more labour before the sacks go to the market. Hard toil and hard fare: the bread which the reapers have brought with them for their luncheon is hard and dry, the heat has dried it like a chip. In the corner of the field the women have gathered some sticks and lighted a fire—the flame is scarce seen in the sunlight, and the sticks seem eaten away as they burn by some invisible power. They are boiling a kettle, and their bread, too, which they will soak in the tea, is dry and chip-like. Aside, on the ground by the hedge, is a handkerchief tied at the corners, with a few mushrooms in it.

The scented clover field—the white champions dot it here and there—yields a rich, nectarous food for ten thousand bees, whose hum comes together with its odour on the air. But these men and women and children ceaselessly toiling know no such sweets; their food is as hard as their labour. How many foot-pounds, then, of human energy do these grains in my hand represent? Do they not in their little compass contain the potentialities, the past and the future, of human life itself?

Another train booms across the iron bridge in the hollow. In a few hours now the carriages will be crowded with men hastening home from their toil in the City. The narrow streak of sunshine which day by day falls for a little while upon the office floor, yellowed by the dingy pane, is all, perhaps, to remind them of the sun and sky, of the forces of Nature; and that little is unnoticed. The pressure of business is so severe in these later days that in the hurry and excitement it is not wonderful many should forget that the world is not comprised in the court of a City thoroughfare.

Rapt and absorbed in discount and dollars, in bills and merchandise, the overstrung mind de- all—

the body is forgotten, the physical body, which is subject to growth and change, like the plants and the very grass of the field. But there is a subtle connection between the physical man and the great Nature which comes pressing up so closely to the metropolis. He still depends in the nineteenth century, as in the dim ages before the Pyramids, upon this tiny yellow grain here, rubbed out from the ear of wheat. The clever mechanism of the locomotive which bears him to and fro, week after week and month after month, from home to office and from office home, has not rendered him in the least degree independent of this.

But it is no wonder that these things are forgotten in the daily struggle of London. And if the merchant spares an abstracted glance from the morning or evening newspaper out upon the fields from the carriage window, the furrows of the field can have but little meaning. They look to him exactly alike. To the farmer and the labourer such and such a furrow marks an acre and has its bearing, but to the passing glance it is not so. The work in the field is so slow; the passenger by rail sees, as it seems to him, nothing going on; the corn may sow itself almost for all that is noteworthy in apparent labour.

Thus it happens that, although the corn fields and the meadows come so closely up to the offices and warehouses of mighty London, there is a line and mark in the minds of men between them; the man of merchandise does not see what the man of the field sees, though both may pass the same acres every morning. It is inevitable that it should be so. It is easy in London to forget that it is midsummer, till, going some day into Covent-garden Market, you see baskets of the cornflower, or blue-bottle as it is called in the country, ticketed "Corinne," and offered for sale. The lovely azure of the flower recalls

the scene where it was first gathered long since at the edge of the wheat.

By the copse here now the teasles lift their spiny heads high in the hedge, the young nuts are browning, the wild mints flowering on the shores of the ditch, and the reapers are cutting ceaselessly at the ripe corn. The larks have brought their loves to a happy conclusion. Besides them, the wheat in its day has sheltered many other creatures—both animals and birds.

Hares raced about it in the spring, and even in the May sunshine might be seen rambling over the slopes. As it grew higher it hid the leverets and the partridge chicks. Toll has been taken by rook, and sparrow, and pigeon. Enemies, too, have assailed it; the daring couch invaded it, the bindweed climbed up the stalk, the storm rushed along and beat it down. Yet it triumphed, and to-day the full sheaves lean against each other.

## THE PINE WOOD.

THERE was a humming in the tops of the young pines as if a swarm of bees were busy at the green cones. They were not visible through the thick needles, and on listening longer it seemed as if the sound was not exactly the note of the bee—a slightly different pitch, and the hum was different, while bees have a habit of working close together. Where there is one bee there are usually five or six, and the hum is that of a group; here there only appeared one or two insects to a pine. Nor was the buzz like that of the humble bee, for every now and then one came along low down, flying between the stems, and his n      much deeper. By and by, crossing to the

edge of the plantation, where the boughs could be examined, being within reach, I found it was wasps. A yellow wasp wandered over the blue-green needles till he found a pair with a drop of liquid like dew between them. There he fastened himself and sucked at it; you could see the drop gradually drying up till it was gone. The largest of these drops were generally between two needles—those of the Scotch fir or pine grow in pairs—but there were smaller drops on the outside of other needles. In searching for this exuding turpentine the wasps filled the whole plantation with the sound of their wings. There must have been many thousands of them. They caused no inconvenience to any one walking in the copse, because they were high overhead.

Watching these wasps I found two cocoons of pale yellow silk on a branch of larch, and by them a green spider. He was quite green—two shades, lighter on the back, but little lighter than the green larch bough. An ant had climbed up a pine and over to the extreme end of a bough, she seemed slow and stupefied in her motions, as if she had drunk of the turpentine and had lost her intelligence. The soft cones of the larch could be easily cut down the centre with a penknife, showing the structure of the cone and the seeds inside each scale. It is for these seeds that birds frequent the fir copses, shearing off the scales with their beaks. One larch cone had still the tuft at the top—a pineapple in miniature. The loudest sound in the wood was the humming in the trees; there was no wind, no sunshine; a summer day, still and shadowy, under large clouds high up. To this low humming the sense of hearing soon became accustomed, and it served but to render the silence deeper. In time, as I sat waiting and listening, there came the faintest far-off song of a bird away in the trees; the merest thin upstroke of sound, slight in structure, the echo of the strong spring

singing. This was the summer repetition, dying away. A willow-wren still remembered his love, and whispered about it to the silent fir tops, as in after days we turn over the pages of letters, withered as leaves, and sigh. So gentle, so low, so tender a song the willow-wren sang that it could scarce be known as the voice of a bird, but was like that of some yet more delicate creature with the heart of a woman.

A butterfly with folded wings clung to a stalk of grass; upon the under side of his wing thus exposed there were buff spots, and dark dots and streaks drawn on the finest ground of pearl-grey, through which there came a tint of blue; there was a blue, too, shut up between the wings, visible at the edges. The spots, and dots, and streaks were not exactly the same on each wing; at first sight they appeared similar, but, on comparing one with the other, differences could be traced. The pattern was not mechanical; it was hand-painted by Nature, and the painter's eye and fingers varied in their work.

How fond Nature is of spot-markings!—the wings of butterflies, the feathers of birds, the surface of eggs, the leaves and petals of plants are constantly spotted; so, too, fish—as trout. From the wing of the butterfly I looked involuntarily at the foxglove I had just gathered; inside, the bells were thickly spotted—dots and dustings that might have been transferred to a butterfly's wing. The spotted meadow-orchis; the brown dots on the cowslips; brown, black, greenish, reddish dots and spots and dustings on the eggs of the finches, the whitethroats, and so many others—some of the spots seem as if they had been splashed on and had run into short streaks, some mottled, some gathered together at the end; all spots, dots, dustings of minute specks, mottlings, and irregular markings. The histories, the stories, the library of knowledge contained



in those signs! It was thought a wonderful thing when at last the strange inscriptions of Assyria were read, made of nail-headed characters whose sound was lost; it was thought a triumph when the yet older hieroglyphics of Egypt were compelled to give up their messages, and the world hoped that we should know the secrets of life. That hope was disappointed; there was nothing in the records but superstition and useless ritual. But here we go back to the beginning; the antiquity of Egypt is nothing to the age of these signs—they date from unfathomable time. In them the sun has written his commands, and the wind inscribed deep thought. They were before superstition began; they were composed in the old, old world, when the Immortals walked on earth. They have been handed down thousands upon thousands of years to tell us that to-day we are still in the presence of the heavenly visitants, if only we will give up the soul to these pure influences. The language in which they are written has no alphabet, and cannot be reduced to order. It can only be understood by the heart and spirit. Look down into this foxglove bell, and you will know that; look long and lovingly at this blue butterfly's underwing, and a feeling will rise to your consciousness.

Some time passed, but the butterfly did not move; a touch presently disturbed him, and flutter, flutter went his blue wings, only for a few seconds, to another grass stalk, and so on from grass stalk to grass stalk as compelled, a yard flight at most. He would not go farther; wind, settled as if it had been night. There was no sun—under and under the clouds he had no animation. A course of went by singing in the air, and as he flew his tail was shut, and but one streak of feathers drawn. Though but young trees, there was a coating of needles under the firs an inch thick, and beneath the dry slight earth felt warm. A fern here and there

came up through it, the palest of pale green, quite a different colour from the same species growing in the hedges away from the copse. A yellow fungus, streaked with scarlet as if blood had soaked into it, stood at the foot of a tree occasionally. Black fungi, dry, shrivelled, and dead, lay fallen about, detached from the places where they had grown, and crumbling if handled. Still more silent after sunset, the wood was utterly quiet; the swallows no longer passed twittering, the willow-wren was gone, there was no hum or rustle; the wood was as silent as a shadow.

But before the darkness a song and an answer arose in a tree, one bird singing a few notes and another replying side by side. Two goldfinches sat on the cross of a larch and sang, looking towards the west, where the light lingered. High up, the larch boughs with the top shoot form a cross; on this one goldfinch sat, the other was immediately beneath. At even the birds often turn to the west as they sing.

Next morning the August sun shone, and the wood was all a-hum with insects. The wasps were working at the pine boughs high overhead; the bees by dozens were crowding to the bramble flowers; swarming on them, they seemed so delighted; humble bees went wandering among the ferns in the copse and in the ditches—they sometimes alight on fern—and calling at every purple heath-blossom, at the purple knapweeds, purple thistles, and broad handfuls of yellow-weed flowers. Wasp-like flies barred with yellow suspended themselves in the air between the pine-trunks like hawks hovering, and suddenly shot themselves a yard forward or to one side, as if the rapid vibration of their wings while hovering had accumulated force which drove them as if discharged from a cross-bow. The sun had set all things in motion. There was a hum under the oak by the hedge, a hum

in the pine wood, a humming among the heath and the dry grass which heat had browned. The air was alive and merry with sound, so that the day seemed quite different and twice as pleasant. Three blue butterflies fluttered in one flowery corner, the warmth gave them vigour, two had a silvery edging to their wings; one was brown and blue. The nuts reddening at the tips appeared ripening like apples in the sunshine. This corner is a favourite with wild bees and butterflies; if the sun shines they are sure to be found there at the heath-bloom and tall yellow-weed, and among the dry seeding bennets or grass stalks. All things, even butterflies, are local in their habits. Far up on the hillside the blue green of the pines beneath shone in the sun—a burnished colour; the high hillside is covered with heath and heather. Where there are open places a small species of gorse, scarcely six inches high, is in bloom, the yellow blossom on the extremity of the stalk.

Some of these gorse plants seemed to have a different flower growing at the side of the stem, instead of at the extremity. These florets were cream-coloured, so that it looked like a new species of gorse. On gathering it to examine the thick-set florets, it was found that a slender runner or creeper had been torn up with it. Like a thread the creeper had wound itself round and round the furze, buried in and hidden by the prickles, and it was this creeper that bore the white or cream florets. It was tied round as tightly as thread could be, so that the florets seemed to start from the stem, deceiving the eye at first. In some places this parasite plant had grown up the heath and strangled it, so that the tips turned brown and died. The runners extended in every direction across the ground, like those of strawberries. One creeper had climbed up a bennet, or seeding grass stalk, binding the stalk and a blade of the grass together, and flowering

there. On the ground there were patches of grey lichen ; many of the pillar-like stems were crowned with a red top. Under a small boulder stone there was an ants' nest. These boulders, or, as they are called locally, "bowlers," were scattered about the heath. Many of the lesser stones were spotted with dark dots of lichen, not unlike a toad.

Thoughtlessly turning over a boulder about nine inches square, lo ! there was subject enough for thinking underneath it—a subject that has been thought about many thousand years ; for this piece of rock had formed the roof of an ants' nest. The stone had sunk three inches deep into the dry soil of sand and peaty mould, and in the floor of the hole the ants had worked out their excavations, which resembled an outline map. The largest excavation was like England ; at the top, or north, they had left a narrow bridge, an eighth of an inch wide, under which to pass into Scotland, and from Scotland again another narrow arch led to the Orkney Islands ; these last, however, were dug in the perpendicular side of the hole. In the corners of these excavations tunnels ran deeper into the ground, and the ants immediately began hurrying their treasures, the eggs, down into these cellars. At one angle a tunnel went beneath the heath into further excavations beneath a second boulder stone. Without, a fern grew, and the dead dry stems of heather crossed each other.

This discovery led to the turning over of another boulder stone not far off, and under it there appeared a much more extensive and complete series of galleries, bridges, cellars, and tunnels. In these the whole life-history of the ant was exposed at a single glance, as if one had taken off the roofs of a city. One cell contained a dust-like deposit, another a collection resembling the dust, but now elongated and a little greenish ; a third treasury,

much larger, was piled up with yellowish grains about the size of wheat, each with a black dot on the top, and looking like minute hop-pockets. Besides these, there was a pure white substance in a corridor, which the irritated ants seemed particularly anxious to remove out of sight, and quickly carried away. Among the ants rushing about there were several with wings; one took flight; one was seized by a wingless ant and dragged down into a cellar, as if to prevent its taking wing. A helpless green fly was in the midst, and round the outside galleries there crept a creature like a spider, seeming to try to hide itself. If the nest had been formed under glass, it could not have been more open to view. The stone was carefully replaced.

Below the pine wood on the slope of the hill a plough was already at work, the crop of peas having been harvested. The four horses came up the slope, and at the ridge swept round in a fine curve to go back and open a fresh furrow. As soon as they faced downhill they paused, well aware of what had to be done, and the ploughman in a manner knocked his plough to pieces, putting it together again the opposite way, that the earth he was about to cut with the share might fall on what he had just turned. With a piece of iron he hammered the edge of the share, to set it, for the hard ground had bent the edge, and it did not cut properly. I said his team looked light; they were not so heavily built as the cart-horses used in many places. No, he said, they did not want heavy horses. "Dese yer thick-boned hosses be more clutter-headed over the clods," as he expressed it, *i.e.* more clumsy or thick-headed over the clods. He preferred comparatively light cart-horses to step well. In the heat of the sun the furze-pods kept popping and bursting open, they are often as full of insects as seeds, and the insects come creeping out. A green-and-black lady-bird

—exactly like a tortoise—flew on to my hand. Again on the heath, and the grasshoppers rose at every step, sometimes three or four springing in as many directions. They were winged, and as soon as they were up spread their vanes and floated forwards. As the force of the original hop decreased, the wind took their wings and turned them aside from the straight course before they fell. Down the dusty road, inches deep in sand, comes a sulphur butterfly, rushing as quick as if hastening to a butterfly fair. If only rare, how valued he would be! His colour is so evident and visible; he fills the road, being brighter than all, and for the moment is more than the trees and flowers.

## SIR BEVIS AND THE WIND.

It happened that one morning the waggon was going up on the hills to bring down a load of straw. When Bevis saw the horses brought out of the stable, nothing would do but he must go with them, and as his papa and the bailiff were on this particular occasion to accompany the waggon, Bevis had his own way as usual.

The road passed not far from the copse, and Bevis heard the woodpecker say something, but he was too busy touching up the horses with the carter's long whip to pay any heed. If he had been permitted he would have lashed them into a sharp trot. Every now, and then Bevis turned round to give the bailiff a sly flick with the whip; the bailiff sat at the tail and dangled his legs over behind, so that his broad back was a capital thing to hit. By and by the carter left the highway and took the waggon along a lane where the ruts were white with chalk,

and the lane wound round at the foot of the Downs. Then after surmounting a steep hill, where the lane had worn a deep hollow, they found a plain with hills all round it, and here, close to the sward, was the straw rick from which they were to load.

Bevis insisted upon building the load, that is putting the straw in its place when it was thrown up; but in three minutes he said he hated it, it was so hot and scratchy, so out he jumped. Then he ran a little way up the green sward of the hill, and lying down rolled over and over to the bottom. Next he wandered along the low hedge dividing the stubble from the sward, so low that he could jump over it, but as he could not find anything he came back, and at last so teased and worried his papa to let him go up to the top of the hill, that he consented, on Bevis promising in the most solemn manner that he would not go a single inch beyond the summit, where there was an ancient earthwork.

Away he ran thirty yards up the hill at a burst, but it soon became so steep he had to stay and climb slowly. Five minutes afterwards he began to find it very hard work indeed, though it looked so easy from below, and stopped to rest. He turned round and looked down; he could see over the waggon and the straw rick, over the ash trees in the hedges, over the plain (all yellow with stubble) across to the hills on the other side, and there, through a gap in them, it seemed as if the land suddenly ceased, or dropped down, and beyond was a dark blue expanse which ended in the sky where the sky came down to touch it.

By his feet was a rounded boulder stone, brown and smooth, a hard sarsen; this he tried to move, but it was so heavy that he could but just stir it. But the more difficult a thing was, or the more he was resisted, the more determined Bevis always became. He would stamp and

shout with rage, rather than let a thing alone quietly. When he did this sometimes Pan, the spaniel, would look at him in amazement, and wonder why he did not leave it and go on and do something else, as the world was so big, and there were very many easy things that could be done without any trouble. That was not Bevis's idea, however, at all; he never quitted a thing till he had done it. And so he tugged and strained and struggled with the stone till he got it out of its bed and on the sloping sward.

Then he pushed and heaved at it, till it began to roll, and giving it a final thrust with his foot, away it went, at first rumbling and rolling slowly and then faster and with a thumping, till presently it bounded and leaped ten yards at a time, and at the bottom of the hill sprang over the hedge like a hunter, and did not stop till it had gone twenty yards out into the stubble towards the straw rick. Then, waving his hat, away he went again, now picking up a flint to fling as far down as he could, now kicking over a white round puff-ball—always up, up, till he grew hot, and his breath came in quick deep pants.

But still as determined as ever, he pushed on, and presently stood on the summit, on the edge of the fosse. He looked down; the waggon seemed under his feet; the plain, the hills beyond, the blue distant valley on one side, on the other the ridge he had mounted stretched away, and beyond it still more ridges, till he could see no further. He went into the fosse, and there it seemed so pleasant that he sat down, and in a minute lay extended at full length in his favourite position, looking up at the sky. It was much more blue than he had ever seen it before, and it seemed only just over his head; the grasshoppers called in the grass at his side, and he could hear a lark singing far away, but on a level with him. First he thought he would talk to the grasshopper, or



wandered on among the oaks, tapping every one he passed to see which was hollow, till presently he had gone so far he could not see the hills for the boughs.

But just as he was thinking he would ask a bee to show him the way out (for there was not a single bird in the wood), he came to a place where the oaks were thinner, and the space between them was covered with bramble bushes. Some of the blackberries were ripe, and his lips were soon stained with their juice. Passing on from bramble thicket to bramble thicket, by and by he shouted, and danced, and clapped his hands with joy, for there were some nuts on a hazel bough, and they were ripe, he was sure, for the side towards the sun was rosy. He knew that nuts do not get brown first, but often turn red towards the south. Out came his pocket-knife, and with seven tremendous slashes, for Bevis could not do anything steadily, off came a branch with a crook. He crooked down the bough and gathered the nuts, there were eight on that bough, and four on the next, and on the next only two. But there was another stole beyond, from which, in a minute, he had twenty more, and then as he could not stay to crack them, he crammed them into his pocket and ceased to reckon.

"I will take fifty up to the squirrel," he said to himself, "and the nut-crackers, and show him how to do it properly with some salt." So he tugged at the boughs, and dragged them down, and went on from stole to stole till he had roamed into the depths of the nut tree wood.

Then, as he stopped a second to step over a little streamlet that oozed along at his feet, all at once he became aware how still it was. No birds sang, and no jay called; no woodpecker chuckled; there was not even a robin; nor had he seen a rabbit, or a squirrel, or a dragon-fly, or any of his friends. Already the outer rims

of some of the hazel leaves were brown, while the centre of the leaf remained green, but there was not even the rustle of a leaf as it fell. The larks were not here, nor the swallows, nor the rooks; the streamlet at his feet went on without a murmur; and the breeze did not come down into the hollow. Except for a bee, whose buzz seemed quite loud as he flew by, there was not a moving thing. Bevis was alone; he had never before been so utterly alone, and he stopped humming the old tune the brook had taught him, to listen.

He lifted his crook and struck the water; it splashed, but in a second it was still again. He flung a dead branch into a tree; it cracked as it hit a bough, on which the leaves rustled; then it fell thump, and lay still and quiet. He stamped on the ground, the grass gave no sound. He shouted "Holloa!" but there was no echo. His voice seemed to slip away from him, he could not shout so loud as he had been accustomed to. For a minute he liked it; then he began to think it was not so pleasant; then he wanted to get out, but he could not see the hill, so he did not know which way to go.

So he stroked a knotted oak with his hand, smoothing it down, and said, "Oak, oak, tell me which way to go!" and the oak tried to speak, but there was no wind and he could not, but he dropped just one leaf on the right side, and Bevis picked it up, and as he did so a nut tree bough brushed his cheek.

He kissed the bough, and said, "Nut tree bough, nut tree bough, tell me the way to go!" The bough could not speak for the same reason that the oak could not; but it bent down towards the streamlet. Bevis dropped on one knee and lifted up a little water in the hollow of his hand, and drank it, and asked which way to go.

The stream could not speak because there was no stone to splash against, but it sparkled in the sunshine

call to one of the swallows, but he had now got over the effort of climbing, and he could not sit still.

Up he jumped, ran up the rampart, and then down again into the fosse. He liked the trench best, and ran along it in the hollow, picking up stray flints and throwing them as far as he could. The trench wound round the hill, and presently when he saw a low hawthorn bush just outside the broad green ditch, and scrambled up to it, the waggon was gone and the plain, for he had reached the other side of the camp. There the top of the hill was level and broad: a beautiful place for a walk.

Bevis went a little way out upon it, and the turf was so soft, and seemed to push up his foot so, that he must go on, and when he had got a little farther, he heard another grasshopper, and thought he would run and catch him; but the grasshopper, who had heard of his tricks, stopped singing, and hid in a bunch, so that Bevis could not see him.

Next he saw a little round hill—a curious little hill—not very much higher than his own head, green with grass and smooth. This curious little hill greatly pleased him; he would have liked to have it carried down into his garden at home; he ran up on the top of it, and shouted at the sun, and danced round on the tumulus. A third grasshopper called in the grass, and Bevis ran down after him, but he, too, was too cunning; then a glossy ball of thistledown came up so silently, Bevis did not see it till it touched him, and lingered a moment lovingly against his shoulder. Before he could grasp it, it was gone.

A few steps farther and he found a track crossing the hill, waggon-ruts in the turf, and ran along it a little way—only a little way, for he did not care for anything straight. Next he saw a mushroom, and gathered it, and

while hunting about hither and thither for another, came upon some boulder stones, like the one he had hurled down the slope, but very much larger, big enough to play hide-and-seek behind. He danced round these—Bevis could not walk—and after he had danced round every one, and peered under and climbed over one or two, he discovered that they were put in a circle.

"Somebody's been at play here," thought Bevis, and looking round to see who had been placing the stones in a ring, he saw a flock of rooks far off in the air, even higher up than he was on the hill, wheeling about, soaring round with outspread wings and cawing. They slipped past each other in and out, tracing a maze, and rose up, drifting away slowly as they rose; they were so happy, they danced in the sky. Bevis ran along the hill in the same direction they were going, shouting and waving his hand to them, and they cawed to him in return.

When he looked to see where he was he was now in the midst of long mounds or heaps of flints that had been dug and stacked; he jumped on them, and off again, picked up the best for throwing, and flung them as far as he could. There was a fir copse but a little distance farther, he went to it, but the trees grew so close together he could not go through, so he walked round it, and then the ground declined so gently he did not notice he was going downhill. At the bottom there was a wood of the strangest old twisted oaks he had ever seen; not the least like the oak trees by his house at home that he knew so well.

These were short, and so very knotty that even the trunks, thick as they were, seemed all knots, and the limbs were gnarled, and shaggy with grey lichen. He threw pieces of dead stick, which he found on the ground, up at the acorns, but they were not yet ripe, so he

(as Bevis had pushed the bough aside), and looked so pleasant that he followed it a little way, and then he came to an open place with twisted old oaks, gnarled and knotted, where a blue butterfly was playing.

"Show me the way out, you beautiful creature," said Bevis

"So I will, Bevis dear," said the butterfly. "I have just come from your waggon, and your papa and the bailiff have been calling to you, and I think they will soon be coming back to look for you. Follow me, my darling."

So Bevis followed the little blue butterfly, who danced along as straight as it was possible for him to go, for he, like Bevis, did not like too much straightness. Now, the oak knew the butterfly was there, and that was why he dropped his leaf, and so did the nut tree bough, and that was why he drooped and let the sun sparkle on the water, and the stream smiled to make Bevis follow him to where the butterfly was playing. Without pausing anywhere, but just zigzagging on, the blue butterfly floated before Bevis, who danced after him, the nuts falling from his crammed pockets; knocking every oak as he went with his stick, asking them if they knew anything, or had anything to tell the people in the copse near his house. The oaks were bursting with things to tell him, and messages to send, but they could not speak, as there was no breeze in the hollow. He whipped the bramble bushes with his crook, but they did not mind in the least, they were so glad to see him.

He whistled to the butterfly to stop a moment while he picked a blackberry; the butterfly settled on a leaf. Then away they went again together till they left the wood behind and began to go up the hill. There the butterfly grew restless, and could scarce restrain his pace for Bevis to keep up, as they were now in the sunshine.

Bevis raced after as fast as he could go uphill, but at the top the butterfly thought he saw a friend of his, and telling Bevis that somebody would come to him in a minute, away he flew. Bevis looked round, but it was all strange and new to him; there were hills all round, but there was no waggon, and no old trench or rampart; nothing but the blue sky and the great sun, which did not seem far off.

While he wondered which way to go, the wind came along the ridge, and taking him softly by the ear pushed him gently forward and said, "Bevis, my love, I have been waiting for you ever so long; why did you not come before?"

"Because you never asked me," said Bevis.

"Oh yes, I did; I asked you twenty times in the copse. I beckoned to you out of the great oak, under which you went to sleep; and I whispered to you from the fir trees where the squirrel played, but you were so busy, dear, so busy with Kapchack, and the war, and Choo Hoo, and the court, and all the turmoil, that you did not hear me."

"You should have called louder," said Bevis.

"So I did," said the wind. "Don't you remember I whirled the little bough against your window, and rattled the casement that night you saw the owl go by?"

"I was so sleepy," said Bevis, "I did not know what you meant; you should have kissed me."

"So I did," said the wind. "I kissed you a hundred times out in the field, and stroked your hair, but you would not take any notice."

"I had so much to do," said Bevis; "there was the weasel and my cannon-stick."

"But I wanted you very much," said the wind, "because I love you, and I longed for you to come and visit me."

"Well, now I am come," said Bevis. "But where do you live?"

"This is where I live, dear," said the wind. "I live upon the hill! Sometimes I go to the sea, and sometimes to the woods, and sometimes I run through the valley, but I always come back here, and you may always be sure of finding me here; and I want you to come and romp with me."

"I will come," said Bevis; "I like a romp, but are you very rough?"

"Oh no, dear; not with you."

"I am a great big boy," said Bevis; "I am eating my peck of salt very fast: I shall soon get too big to romp with you. How old are you, you jolly Wind?"

The wind laughed and said, "I am older than all the very old things. I am as old as the brook."

"But the brook is very old," said Bevis. "He told me he was older than the hills, so I do not think you *are* as old as he is."

"Yes I am," said the wind; "he was always my playfellow; we were children together."

"If you are so very, very old," said Bevis, "it is no use your trying to romp with me, because I am very strong; I can carry my papa's gun on my shoulder, and I can run very fast; do you know the stupid old bailiff can't catch me? I can go round the ricks ever so much quicker than he can."

"I can run quick," said the wind.

"But not so quick as me," said Bevis; "now see if you can catch me."

Away he ran, and for a moment he left the wind behind; but the wind blew a little faster and overtook him, and they raced along together like two wild things, till Bevis began to pant. Then down he sat on the turf and kicked up his heels and shouted, and the wind fanned

his cheek and cooled him, and kissed his lips and stroked his hair, and caressed him and played with him, till up he jumped again and danced along, the wind always pushing him gently.

"You are a jolly old Wind," said Bevis. "I like you very much; but you must tell me a story, else we shall quarrel. I'm sure we shall."

"I will try," said the wind; "but I have forgotten all my stories, because the people never come to listen to me now."

"Why don't they come?" said Bevis.

"They are too busy," said the wind, sighing; "they are so very, very busy, just as you were with Kapchack and his treasure and the war, and all the rest of the business; they have so much to do, they have quite forsaken me."

"I will come to you," said Bevis; "do not be sorry. I will come and play with you."

"Yes, do," said the wind; "and drink me, dear, as much as ever you can. I shall make you strong. Now drink me."

Bevis stood still and drew in a long, long breath, drinking the wind till his chest was full and his heart beat quicker. Then he jumped and danced and shouted.

"There," said the wind, "see, how jolly I have made you! It was I who made you dance and sing, and run along the hill just now. Come up here, my darling Sir Bevis, and drink me as often as ever you can, and the more you drink of me the happier you will be, and the longer you will live. And people will look at you and say, 'How jolly he looks! Is he not nice? I wish I was like him.' And presently they will say, 'Where does he learn all these things?'"

"For you must know, Bevis, my dear, that although I have forgotten my stories, yet they are all still there in



will be bright, and your step quick, and you will sing and shout——”

“So I will,” said Bevis, “I will shout. Holloa!” and he ran up to the top of the little round hill, to which they had now returned, and danced about on it as wild as could be.

“Dance away, dear,” said the wind, much delighted. “Everybody dances who drinks me. The man in the hill there——”

“What man?” said Bevis, “and how did he get in the hill? Just tell him I want to speak to him.”

“Darling,” said the wind, very quietly and softly, “he is dead, and he is in the little hill you are standing on, under your feet. At least, he was there once, but there is nothing of him there now. Still, it is his place, and as he loved me, and I loved him, I come very often and sing here.”

“When did he die?” said Bevis. “Did I ever see him?”

“He died about a minute ago, dear; just before you came up the hill. If you were to ask the people who live in the houses, where they will not let me in (they carefully shut out the sun too), they would tell you he died thousands of years ago; but they are foolish, very foolish. It was hardly so long ago as yesterday. Did not the brook tell you all about that?”

“Now this man, and all his people, used to love me and drink me, as much as ever they could all day long and a great part of the night, and when they died they still wanted to be with me, and so they were all buried on the tops of the hills, and you will find these curious little mounds everywhere on the ridges, dear, where I blow along. There I come to them still, and sing through the long dry grass, and rush over the turf, and I bring the scent of the clover from the plain, and the bees come

humming along upon me. The sun comes too, and the rain. But I am here most; the sun only shines by day, and the rain only comes now and then.

"But I am always here, day and night, winter and summer. Drink me as much as you will, you cannot drink me away; there is always just as much of me left. As I told you, the people who were buried in these little mounds used to drink me, and oh! how they raced along the turf, dear; there is nobody can run so fast now: and they leaped and danced, and sang and shouted. I loved them as I love you, my darling; there, sit down and rest on the thyme, dear, and I will stroke your hair and sing to you."

So Bevis sat down on the thyme, and the wind began to sing, so low and sweet and so strange an old song, that he closed his eyes and leaned on his arm on the turf. There were no words to the song, but Bevis understood it all, and it made him feel so happy. The great sun smiled upon him, the great earth bore him in her arms gently, the wind caressed him, singing all the while. Now Bevis knew what the wind meant; he felt with his soul out to the far-distant sun just as easily as he could feel with his hand to the bunch of grass beside him; he felt with his soul down through into the earth just as easily as he could touch the sward with his fingers. Something seemed to come to him out of the sunshine and the grass.

"There never was a yesterday," whispered the wind presently, "and there never will be to-morrow. It is all one long to-day. When the man in the hill was you were too, and he still is now you are here; but of these things you will know when you are older, that is if you will only continue to drink me. Come, dear, let us race on again." So the two went on and came to a hawthorn bush, and Bevis, full of mischief always, tried to slip

my mind, and by and by, if you keep on drinking me, I shall tell you all of them, and nobody will know how you learn it all. For I know more than the brook, because, you see, I travel about everywhere: and I know more than the trees; indeed, all they know I taught them myself. The sun is always telling me everything, and the stars whisper to me at night: the ocean roars at me: the earth whispers to me: just you lie down, Bevis love, upon the ground and listen."

So Bevis lay down on the grass, and heard the wind whispering in the tufts and bunches, and the earth under him answered, and asked the wind to stay and talk. But the wind said, "I have got Bevis to-day: come on, Bevis," and Bevis stood up and walked along.

"Besides all these things," said the wind, "I can remember everything that ever was. There never was anything that I cannot remember, and my mind is so clear that if you will but come up here and drink me, you will understand everything."

"Well, then," said Bevis, "I will drink you—there, I have just had such a lot of you: now tell me this instant why the sun is up there, and is he very hot if you touch him, and which way does he go when he sinks beyond the wood, and who live up there, and are they nice people, and who painted the sky?"

The wind laughed aloud, and said, "Bevis, my darling, you have not drunk half enough of me yet, else you would never ask such silly questions as that. Why, those are like the silly questions the people ask who live in the houses of the cities, and never feel me or taste me, or speak to me. And I have seen them looking through long tubes——"

"I know," said Bevis; "they are telescopes, and you look at the sun and the stars, and they tell you all about them."

"Pooh!" said the wind, "don't you believe such stuff and rubbish, my pet. How can they know anything about the sun who are never out in the sunshine, and never come up on the hills, or go into the wood? How can they know anything about the stars who never stopped on the hills, or on the sea all night? How can they know anything of such things who are shut up in houses, dear, where I cannot come in?"

"Bevis, my love, if you want to know all about the sun, and the stars, and everything, make haste and come to me, and I will tell you, dear. In the morning, dear, get up as quick as you can, and drink me as I come down from the hill. In the day go up on the hill, dear, and drink me again, and stay there if you can till the stars shine out, and drink still more of me.

"And by and by you will understand all about the sun, and the moon, and the stars, and the earth which is so beautiful, Bevis. It is so beautiful, you can hardly believe how beautiful it is. Do not listen, dear, not for one moment, to the stuff and rubbish they tell you down there in the houses where they will not let me come. If they say the earth is not beautiful, tell them they do not speak the truth. But it is not their fault, for they have never seen it, and as they have never drunk me their eyes are closed, and their ears shut up tight. But every evening, dear, before you get into bed, do you go to your window—as you did the evening the owl went by—and lift the curtain and look up at the sky, and I shall be somewhere about, or else I shall be quiet in order that there may be no clouds, and you may see the stars. In the morning, as I said before, rush out and drink me up.

"The more you drink of me, the more you will want, and the more I shall love you. Come up to me upon the hills, and your heart will never be heavy, but your eyes

my mind, and by and by, if you keep on drinking me. I shall tell you all of them, and nobody will know how you learn it all. For I know more than the brook, because, you see, I travel about everywhere: and I know more than the trees; indeed, all they know I taught them myself. The sun is always telling me everything, and the stars whisper to me at night: the ocean roars at me: the earth whispers to me: just you lie down, Bevis love, upon the ground and listen."

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## AMONG THE NUTS.

THE nuts are ripening once more, and it is almost the time to go a-gipsying—the summer passes like the shadow of a cloud which strikes the edge of the yellow wheat and comes over and is gone; it does not give you time to rub out a single ear of corn. Before it is possible to gather the harvest of thought and observation, the summer has passed, and we must bind the hastily stitched book with the crimson leaves of autumn. Under these very hazel boughs only yesterday, *i.e.* in May, looking for cuckoo-sorrel, as the wood-sorrel is called, there rolled down a brown last year's nut from among the moss of the bank. In the side of this little brown nut, at its thicker end, a round hole had been made with a sharp tool which had left the marks of its chiselling. Through this hole the kernel had been extracted by the skilful mouse. Two more nuts were found on the same bank, bored by the same carpenter. The holes looked as if he had turned the nut round and round as he gnawed. Unless the nut had shrunk, the hole was not large enough to pull the kernel out all at once; it must have been eaten little by little in many mouthfuls. The same amount of nibbling would have sawn a circle round the nut, and so, dividing the shell in two, would have let the kernel out bodily—a plan more to our fancy; but the mouse is a nibbler, and he preferred to nibble, nibble, nibble. Hard by one afternoon, as the cows were lazily swishing their tails coming home to milking, and the shadow of the thick hedge had already caused the anemones in the grass to close their petals, there was a slight rustling sound. Out into the cool grass by some cowslips there came a small dark head. It was an adder, verily a snake in the grass and flowers.

His quick eye—you know the proverb, "If his ear were as quick as his eye, No man should pass him by"—caught sight of us immediately, and he turned back. The hedge was hollow there, and the mound grown over with close-laid, narrow-leaved ivy. The viper did not sink in these leaves, but slid with a rustling sound fully exposed above them. His grey length and the chain of black diamond spots down his back, his flat head with deadly tooth, did not harmonize as the green snake does with leaf and grass. He was too marked, too prominent—a venomous foreign thing, fit for tropic sands and nothing English or native to our wilds. He seemed like a reptile that had escaped from the glass case of some collection.

The green snake or grass snake, with yellow-marked head, fits in perfectly with the floating herbage of the watery places he frequents. The eye soon grows accustomed to his curves, till he is no more startling than a frog among the water-crowfoot you are about to gather. To the adder the mind never becomes habituated; he ever remains repellent. This adder was close to a house and cowshed, and, indeed, they seem to like to be near cows. Since then a large silvery slowworm was killed just there—a great pity, for they are perfectly harmless. We saw, too, a very large lizard under the heath. Three little effets (efts) ran into one hole on the bank yesterday. Some of the men in spring went off into the woods to "flawing," *i.e.* to barking the oak which is thrown in May—the bark is often used now for decoration, like the Spanish cork bark. Some were talking already of the "grit" work and looking forward to it, that is, to mowing and haymaking, which mean better wages. The farmers were grumbling that their oats were cuckoo oats, not sown till the cuckoo cried, and not likely to come to much. So, indeed, it fell out, for the oats looked very thin and spindly when the nuts turned rosy again. At



work hoeing among the "kelk" or "kilk," the bright yellow charlock, the labourers stood up as the cuckoo flew over singing, and blew cuckoo back to him in their hollow fists. This is a trick they have, something like whistling in the fist, and so naturally done as to deceive any one. The children had been round with the May garland, which takes the place of the May-pole, and is carried slung on a stick, and covered with a white cloth, between two little girls. The cloth is to keep the dust and sun from spoiling the flowers—the rich golden kingcups and the pale anemones trained about two hoops, one within the other. They take the cloth off to show you the garland, and surely you must pay them a penny for thought of Old England. Yet there are some who would like to spoil this innocent festival. I have heard of some wealthy people living in a village who do their utmost to break up the old custom by giving presents of money to all the poor children who will go to school on that day instead of a-Maying. A very pitiful thing truly! Give them the money, and let them go a-Maying as well. The same bribe they repeat at Christmas to stay the boys from going round mumming. It is in spring that the folk make most use of herbs, such as herb tea of gorse bloom. One cottager wife exclaimed that she had no patience with women so ignorant they did not know how to use herbs, as wood-sage or wood-betony. Most of the gardens have a few plants of the milky-veined holy thistle—good, they say, against inflammations, and in which they have much faith. Soon after the May garlands the meadow orchis comes up, which is called "dead men's hands," and after that the "ram's-horn" orchis, which has a twisted petal; and in the evening the bat, which they call flittermouse, appears again.

The light is never the same on a landscape many minutes together, as all know who have tried, ever so

crudely, to fix the fleeting expression of the earth with pencil. It is ever changing, and in the same way as you walk by the hedges day by day there is always some fresh circumstance of nature, the interest of which in a measure blots out the past. This morning we found a bramble leaf, something about which has for the moment put the record of months aside. This bramble leaf was marked with a grey streak, which coiled and turned and ran along beside the midrib, forming a sort of thoughtless design, a design without an idea. The Greek fret seems to our eyes in its regularity and its repetition to have a human thought in it. The coils and turns upon this leaf, like many other markings of nature, form a designless design, the idea of which is not traceable back to a mind. They are the work of a leaf-boring larva which has eaten its way between the two skins of the leaf, much like boring a tunnel between the two surfaces of a sheet of paper. If you take a needle you can insert the point in the burrow and pass it along wherever the bore is straight, so that the needle lies between the two sides of the leaf. Off-hand, if any one were asked if it were possible to split a leaf, he would say No. This little creature, however, has worked along inside it, and lived there. The upper surface of the leaf is a darker green, and seems to the touch of firmer texture than the lower; there are no marks on the under surface, which does not seem touched, so that what the creature has really done is to split one surface. He has eaten along underneath it, raising it no doubt a little by the thickness of his body, as if you crept between the carpet and the floor. The softer under surface representing the floor is untouched. The woodbine leaves are often bored like this, and seem to have patterns traced upon them. There is no particle of matter so small but that it seems to have a living thing working at it and resolving it into still

more minute atoms; nothing so insignificant but that upon examination it will be found to be of the utmost value to something alive. Upon almost every fir branch near the end there are little fragments like cotton, so thick in places as quite to hang the boughs with threads; these gossamer-like fragments appear to be left by some insect, perhaps an aphis; and it is curious to note how very very busy the little willow-wrens are in the fir boughs. They are constantly at work there; they sing in the firs in the earliest spring, they stay there all the summer, and now that the edge of autumn approaches their tiny beaks are still picking up insects the whole day long. The insects they devour must be as numerous as the fir needles that lie inches thick on the ground in the copse.

Across a broad, dry, sandy path, worn firm, some thousands of ants passing to and fro their nest had left a slight trail. They were hurrying on in full work, when I drew the top of my walking-stick across their road, obliterating about an inch of it. In an instant the work of the nest was stopped, and thousands upon thousands of factory hands were thrown out of employment. The walking stick had left two little ridges of sand like minute parallel earthworks drawn across their highway. Those that came out of the nest on arriving at the little ridge on their side immediately stopped, worked their antennæ in astonishment, then went up to the top of it, and seemed to try to look round. After a moment they ran back and touched those that were coming on to communicate the intelligence. Every ant that came did exactly the same thing; not one of them passed the little ridge, but all returned. By and by the head of the column began to spread out and search right and left for the lost track. They scouted this way and they scouted that, they turned and doubled and went through

every possible evolution, hundreds of them, sometimes a score at once, yet not one of them attempted to go straight forward, which would have brought them into their old path. It was scarcely thrice the length of an ant's body to where their path began again; they could not see or scent, or in any way find out what was so short a distance in front of them. The most extraordinary thing was that not one ventured to explore straightforward; it was as if their world came to an end at that little ridge, and they were afraid to step into chaos. The same actions were going on behind the other ridge of sand just opposite, an inch away. There the column of ants that had been out foraging met with a like difficulty, and could not find a way. There, too, hundreds of ants were exploring right and left in every direction except straight forward, in a perfect buzz of excitement. Once or twice an ant from either party happened to mount on the parallel ridges at the same time, and if they had strained forward and stretched out their antennæ they could almost have touched each other. Yet they seemed quite unconscious of each other's presence. Unless in a well-worn groove, a single ant appears incapable of running in a straight line. At first their motions searching about suggested the action of a pack of hounds making a cast; hounds, however, would have very soon gone forward and so picked up the trail.

## MY OLD VILLAGE.

JOHN BROWN is dead," said an aged friend and visitor in answer to my inquiry for the strong labourer.

"Is he really dead?" I asked, for it seemed impossible.

"He is. He came home from his work in the evening as usual, and seemed to catch his foot in the threshold and fell forward on the floor. When they picked him up he was dead."

I remember the doorway; a raised piece of wood ran across it, as is commonly the case in country cottages, such as one might easily catch one's foot against if one did not notice it; but he knew that bit of wood well. The floor was of brick, hard to fall on and die. He must have come down over the crown of the hill, with his long slouching stride, as if his legs had been half pulled away from his body by his heavy boots in the furrows when a ploughboy. He must have turned up the steps in the bank to his cottage, and so, touching the threshold, ended. He is gone through the great doorway, and one pencil-mark is rubbed out. There used to be a large hearth in that room, a larger room than in most cottages; and when the fire was lit, and the light shone on the yellowish-red brick beneath and the large rafters overhead, it was homely and pleasant. In summer the door was always wide open. Close by on the high bank there was a spot where the first wild violets came. You might look along miles of hedgerow, but there were never any until they had shown by John Brown's.

If a man's work that he has done all the days of his life could be collected and piled up around him in visible shape, what a vast mound there would be beside some! If each act or stroke was represented, say by a brick,

John Brown would have stood the day before his ending by the side of a monument as high as a pyramid. Then if in front of him could be placed the sum and product of his labour, the profit to himself, he could have held it in his clenched hand like a nut, and no one would have seen it. Our modern people think they train their 'sons to strength by football and rowing and jumping, and what are called athletic exercises; all of which it is the fashion now to preach as very noble, and likely to lead to the goodness of the race. Certainly feats are accomplished and records are beaten, but there is no real strength gained, no hardihood built up. Without hardihood it is of little avail to be able to jump an inch farther than somebody else. Hardihood is the true test, hardihood is the ideal, and not these caperings or ten minutes' spurts.

Now, the way they made the boy John Brown hardy was to let him roll about on the ground with naked legs and bare head from morn till night, from June till December, from January till June. The rain fell on his head, and he played in wet grass to his knees. Dry bread with a little lard was his chief food. He went to work while he was still a child. At half-past three in the morning he was on his way to the farm stables, there to help feed the cart horses, which used to be done with great care very early in the morning. The carter's whip used to sting his legs, and sometimes he felt the butt. At fifteen he was no taller than the sons of well-to-do people at eleven; he scarcely seemed to grow at all till he was eighteen or twenty, and even then very slowly, but at last became a tall big man. That slouching walk, with knees always bent, diminished his height to appearance; he really was the full size, and every inch of his frame had been slowly welded together by this ceaseless work, continual life in the open air, and coarse hard food. This

is what makes a man hardy. This is what makes a man able to stand almost anything, and gives a power of endurance that can never be obtained by any amount of gymnastic training.

I used to watch him mowing with amazement. Sometimes he would begin at half-past two in the morning, and continue till night. About eleven o'clock, which used to be the mowers' noon, he took a rest on a couch of half-dried grass in the shade of the hedge. For the rest, it was mow, mow, mow for the long summer day.

John Brown was dead: died in an instant at his cottage door. I could hardly credit it, so vivid was the memory of his strength. The gap of time since I had seen him last had made no impression on me; to me he was still in my mind the John Brown of the hay field; there was nothing between then and his death.

He used to catch us boys the bats in the stable, and tell us fearful tales of the ghosts he had seen; and bring the bread from the town in an old-fashioned wallet, half in front and half behind, long before the bakers' carts began to come round in country places. Of later days they say he worked in the town a good deal, and did not look so well or so happy as on the farm. In this cottage opposite the violet bank they had small-pox once, the only case I recollect in the hamlet—the old men used to say everybody had it when they were young; this was the only case in my time, and they recovered quickly without any loss, nor did the disease spread. A roomy well-built cottage like that, on dry ground, isolated, is the only hospital worthy of the name. People have a chance to get well in such places; they have very great difficulty in the huge buildings that are put up expressly for them. I have a Convalescent Home in my mind at the moment, a vast building. In these great blocks what they call ventilation

The next cottage was a very marked one, for houses grow to their owners. The low thatched roof had rounded itself and stooped down to fit itself to Job's shoulders; the walls had got short and thick to suit him, and they had a yellowish colour, like his complexion, as if chewing tobacco had stained his cheeks right through. Tobacco juice had likewise penetrated and tinted the wall. It was cut off as it seemed by a party-wall into one room, instead of which there were more rooms beyond which no one would have suspected. Job had a way of shaking hands with you with his right hand, while his left hand was casually doing something else in a detached sort of way. "Yes, sir," and "No, sir," and nodding to everything you said all so complaisant, but at the end of the bargain you generally found yourself in some roundabout



manner a few shillings on the wrong side. Job had a lot of shut-up rooms in his house and in his character, which never seemed to be opened to daylight. The eaves hung over and beetled like his brows, and he had a forelock, a regular antique forelock, which he used to touch with the greatest humility. There was a long bough of an elm hanging over one gable just like the forelock. His face was a blank, like the broad end wall of the cottage, which had no window—at least you might think so until you looked up and discovered one little arrow slit, one narrow pane, and woke with a start to the idea that Job was always up there watching and listening. That was how he looked out of his one eye so intensely cunning, the other being a wall eye—that is, the world supposed so, as he kept it half shut, always between the lights; but whether it was really blind or not I cannot say. Job caught rats and rabbits and moles, and bought faggots, or potatoes, or fruit, or rabbit-skins, or rusty iron; wonderful how he seemed to have command of money. It was done probably by buying and selling almost simultaneously, so that the cash passed really from one customer to another, and was never his at all. Also he worked as a labourer, chiefly piecework; also Mrs. Job had a shop-window about two feet square: snuff and tobacco, bread and cheese, immense big round jumbles and sugar, kept on the floor above, and reached down by hand, when wanted, through the opening for the ladder stairs. The front door—Job's right hand—was always open in summer, and the flagstones of the floor chalked round their edges; a clean table, clean chairs, decent crockery, an old clock about an hour slow, a large hearth with a minute fire to boil the kettle without heating the room. Tea was usually at half-past three, and it is a fact that many well-to-do persons, as they came along the road hot and dusty, used to drop in and rest and take a cup—

very little milk and much gossip. Two paths met just there, and people used to step in out of a storm of rain, a sort of thatched house club. Job was somehow on fair terms with nearly everybody, and that is a wonderful thing in a village, where everybody knows everybody's business, and petty interests continually cross. The strangest fellow and the strangest way of life, and yet I do not believe a black mark was ever put against him; the shiftiness was all for nothing. It arose, no doubt, out of the constant and eager straining to gain a little advantage and make an extra penny. Had Job been a Jew he would have been rich. He was the exact counterpart of the London Jew dealer, set down in the midst of the country. Job should have been rich. Such immense dark brown jumbles, such cheek-distenders—never any French sweetmeats or chocolate or bonbons to equal these. I really think I could eat one now. The pennies and fourpenny-bits—there were fourpenny-bits in those days—that went behind that two-foot window, goodness! there was no end. Job used to chink them in a pint pot sometimes before the company, to give them an idea of his great hoards. He always tried to impress people with his wealth, and would talk of a fifty-pound contract as if it was nothing to him. Jumbles are eternal, if nothing else is. I thought then there was not such another shop as Job's in the universe. I have found since that there is a Job shop in every village, and in every street in every town—that is to say, a window for jumbles and rubbish; and if you don't know it, you may be quite sure your children do, and spend many a sly penny there. Be as rich as you may, and give them gilded sweetmeats at home, still they will slip round to the Job shop.

It was a pretty cottage, well backed with trees and bushes, with a south-east mixture of sunlight and shade,

and little touches that cannot be suggested by writing. Job had not got the Semitic instinct of keeping. The art of acquisition he possessed to some extent, that was his right hand; but somehow the half-crowns slipped away through his unstable left hand, and fortune was a greasy pole to him. His left hand was too cunning for him, it wanted to manage things too cleverly. If it had only had the Semitic grip, digging the nails into the flesh to hold tight each separate coin, he would have been village rich. The great secret is the keeping. Finding is by no means keeping. Job did not flourish in his old days; the people changed round about. Job is gone, and I think every one of that cottage is either dead or moved.

The next cottage was the water-bailiff's, who looked after the great pond or "broad." There were one or two old boats, and he used to leave the oars leaning against a wall at the side of the house. These oars looked like fragments of a wreck, broken and irregular. The right-hand scull was heavy, as if made of ironwood, the blade broad and spoon-shaped, so as to have a most powerful grip of the water. The left-hand scull was light and slender, with a narrow blade like a marrow scoop; so when you had the punt, you had to pull very hard with your left hand and gently with the right to get the forces equal. The punt had a list of its own, and no matter how you rowed, it would still make leeway. Those who did not know its character were perpetually trying to get this crooked wake straight, and consequently went round and round exactly like the whirligig beetle. Those who knew used to let the leeway proceed a good way and then alter it, so as to act in the other direction like an elongated zigzag. These sculls the old fellow would bring you as if they were great treasures, and watch you off in the punt as if he was parting with his dearest. At that date

it was no little matter to coax him round to unchain his vessel. You had to take an interest in the garden, in the baits, and the weather, and be very humble; then perhaps he would tell you he did not want it for the trimmers, or the withy, or the flags, and you might have it for an hour as far as he could see; "did not think my lord's steward would come over that morning; of course, if he did you must come in," and so on; and if the stars were propitious, by and by the punt was got afloat. These skulls were tilted up against the wall, and as you innocently went to take one, Wauw!—a dirty little ill-tempered mongrel poodle rolled himself like a ball to your heels and snapped his teeth—Wauw! At the bark, out rushed the old lady, his housekeeper, shouting in the shrillest key to the dog to lie still, and to you that the bailiff would be there in a minute. At the sound of her shrewish "yang-yang" down came the old man from the bank, and so one dog fetched out the lot. The three were exactly alike somehow. Beside these diamond skulls he had a big gun, with which he used to shoot the kingfishers that came for the little fish; the number he slaughtered was very great; he persecuted them as Domitian did the flies: he declared that a kingfisher would carry off a fish heavier than itself. Also he shot rooks, once now and then strange wild-fowl with this monstrous iron pipe, and something happened with this gun one evening which was witnessed, and after that the old fellow was very benevolent, and the punt was free to one or two who knew all about it. There is an old story about the stick that would not beat the dog, and the dog would not bite the pig, and so on; and so I am quite sure that ill-natured cur could never have lived with that "yang-yang" shrew, nor could any one else but he have turned the gear of the hatch, nor have endured the dog and the woman, and the constant

miasma from the stagnant waters. No one else could have shot anything with that cumbrous weapon, and no one else could row that punt straight. He used to row it quite straight, to the amazement of a wondering world, and somehow supplied the motive force—the stick—which kept all these things going. He is gone, and, I think, the housekeeper too, and the house has had several occupants since, who have stamped down the old ghosts and thrust them out of doors.

After this the cottages and houses came in little groups, some up crooked lanes, hidden away by elms as if out of sight in a cupboard, and some dotted along the brooks, scattered so that, unless you had connected them all with a very long rope, no stranger could have told which belonged to the village and which did not. They drifted into various littings, and yet it was all the same place. They were all thatched. It was a thatched village. This is strictly accurate and strictly inaccurate, for I think there were one or two tiled, and perhaps a modern one slated. Nothing is ever quite rigid or complete that is of man; all rules have a chip in them. The way they built the older thatched farmhouses was to put up a very high wall in front and a very low one behind, and then the roof in a general way sloped down from the high wall to the low wall, an acre broad of thatch. These old thatched houses seemed to be very healthy so long as the old folk lived in them in the old-fashioned way. Thatch is believed to give an equable temperature. The air blew all round them, and it might be said all through them; for the front door was always open three parts of the year, and at the back the dairies were in a continual blow. Upstairs the houses were only one room thick, so that each wall was an outside wall, or rather it was a wall one side and thatched the other, so that the wind went through if a window was open. Modern

houses are often built two rooms thick, so that the air does not circulate from one side to the other. No one seemed to be ill, unless he brought it home with him from some place where he had been visiting. The diseases they used to have were long-lived, such as rheumatism, which may keep a man comfortably in aches and pains forty years. My dear old friend, however, taking them one by one, went through the lot and told me of the ghosts. The forefathers I knew are all gone—the stout man, the lame man, the paralyzed man, the gruff old stick; not one left of the old farmers, not a single one. The fathers, too, of our own generation have been dropping away. The strong young man who used to fill us with such astonishment at the feats he would achieve without a thought, and with no gymnastic training, to whom a sack of wheat was a toy. The strong young man went one day into the harvest field, as he had done so many times before. Suddenly he felt a little dizzy. By and by he went home and became very ill with sunstroke; he recovered, but he was never strong again; he gradually declined for twelve months, and next harvest-time he was under the daisies. Just one little touch of the sun, and the strength of man faded as a leaf. The hardy dark young man, built of iron, broad, thick, and short, who looked as if frost, snow, and heat were all the same to him, had something go wrong in his lung: one twelvemonth, and there was an end. This was a very unhappy affair. The pickaxe and the spade have made almost a full round to every door; I do not want to think any more about this. Family changes and the pressure of these hard times have driven out most of the rest; some seem to have gone quite out of sight; some have crossed the sea; some have abandoned the land as a livelihood. Of the few, the very few that still remain, still fewer abide in their original homes. Time has shuffled them about from house to house like a pack of cards. Of

them all, I verily believe there is but one soul living in the same old house. If the French had landed in the mediæval way to harry with fire and sword, they could not have swept the place more clean.

Almost the first thing I did with pen and ink as a boy was to draw a map of the hamlet with the roads and lanes and paths, and I think some of the ponds, and with each of the houses marked and the occupier's name. Of course, it was very roughly done, and not to any scale, yet it was perfectly accurate and full of detail. I wish I could find it, but the confusion of time has scattered and mixed these early papers. A map by Ptolemy would bear as much resemblance to the same country in a modern atlas as mine to the present state of that locality. It is all gone—rubbed out. The names against the whole of those houses have been altered, one only excepted, and changes have taken place there. Nothing remains. *This is not in a century, half a century, or even in a quarter of a century, but in a few ticks of the clock.*

I think I have heard that the oaks are down. They may be standing or down, it matters nothing to me; the leaves I last saw upon them are gone for evermore, nor shall I ever see them come there again ruddy in spring. I would not see them again even if I could; they could never look again as they used to do. There are too many memories there. The happiest days become the saddest afterwards; let us never go back, lest we too die. There are no such oaks anywhere else, none so tall and straight, and with such massive heads, on which the sun used to shine as if on the globe of the earth, one side in shadow, the other in bright light. How often I have looked at oaks since, and yet have never been able to get the same effect from them! Like an old author printed in another type, the words are the same, but the sentiment is different.

The brooks have ceased to run. There is no music now at the old hatch where we used to sit in danger of our lives, happy as kings, on the narrow bar over the deep water. The barred pike that used to come up in such numbers are no more among the flags. The perch used to drift down the stream, and then bring up again. The sun shone there for a very long time, and the water rippled and sang, and it always seemed to me that I could feel the rippling and the singing and the sparkling back through the centuries. The brook is dead, for when man goes nature ends. I dare say there is water there still, but it is not the brook; the brook is gone like John Brown's soul. There used to be clouds over the fields, white clouds in blue summer skies. I have lived a good deal on clouds; they have been meat to me often; they bring something to the spirit which even the trees do not. I see clouds now sometimes when the iron grip of pain permits for a minute or two; they are very different clouds, and speak differently. I long for some of the old clouds that had no memories. There were nights in those times over those fields, not darkness, but Night, full of glowing suns and glowing richness of life that sprang up to meet them. The nights are there still; they are everywhere, nothing local in the night; but it is not the Night to me seen through the window.

There used to be footpaths. Following one of them, the first field always had a good crop of grass; over the next stile there was a great oak standing alone in the centre of the field, generally a great cart horse under it, and a few rushes scattered about the furrows; the fourth was always full of the finest clover; in the fifth you could scent the beans on the hill, and there was a hedge like a wood, and a nest of the long-tailed tit; the sixth had a runnel and blue forget-me-nots; the seventh had a brooklet



and scattered trees along it; from the eighth you looked back on the slope and saw the thatched house you had left behind under passing shadows, and rounded white clouds going straight for the distant hills, each cloud visibly bulging and bowed down like a bag. I cannot think how the distant thatched houses came to stand out with such clear definition and etched outline and bluish shadows; and beyond these there was the uncertain vale that had no individuality, but the trees put their arms together and<sup>7</sup> became one. All these were meadows, every step was among grass, beautiful grass, and the cuckoos sang as if they had found paradise. A hundred years ago a little old man with silver buckles on his shoes used to walk along this footpath once a week in summer, taking his children over to drink milk at the farm; but though he set them every time to note the number of fields, so busy were they with the nests and the flowers, they could never be sure at the end of the journey whether there were eight or nine. To make quite sure at last, he took with him a pocket full of apples, one of which was eaten in each field, and so they came to know for certain that the number of meadows was either eight or nine, I forget which; and so you see this great experiment did not fix the faith of mankind. Like other great truths, it has grown dim, but it seems strange to think how this little incident could have been borne in mind for a century. There was another footpath that led through the peewit field, where the green plovers for evermore circle round in spring; then past the nightingale field, by the largest maple trees that grew in that country; this too was all grass. Another led along the water to bluebell land; another into the coombs of the hills; all meadows, which was the beauty of it; for though you could find wheat in plenty if you liked, you always walked in grass. All round the compass you could still step on sward. This is

rare. Of one other path I have a faded memory, like a silk marker in an old book; in truth, I don't want to remember it, except the end of it where it came down to the railway. So full was the mind of romance in those days, that I used to get there specially in time to see the express go up, the magnificent engine of the broad gauge that swept along with such ease and power to London. I wish I could feel like that now. The feeling is not quite gone even now, and I have often since seen these great broad-gauge creatures moving alive to and fro like Ezekiel's wheel dream beside the platforms of Babylon with much of the same old delight. Still I never went back with them to the faded footpath, and they are all faded now, these footpaths too.

## NOTES

Page 2. **St. Valentine's day.** It was formerly generally believed that on this day the birds began to mate again after living together during the winter months.

Page 7. **sybarite**, a self-indulgent person. The inhabitants of Sybaris, a Greek town in Southern Italy, became proverbial for their luxurious living and self-indulgence.

Page 18. **Roman tessellated pavement**, a pavement composed of square dies of baked clay or stone, generally of various colours and forming regular geometrical figures. The Roman remains in England furnish several specimens of these pavements.

Page 19. **Chaucer singing of the "floures" of May.** In the prologue of his poem, "The Legende of Good Women," Chaucer tells us that he is so fond of books that very few things can keep him from them,

"Save, certeynly, whan that the month of May  
Is comen, and that I here the foulès syng,  
And that the flourès ginnen for to sprynge,—  
Farewel my boke, and my devocioun."

Page 19. **Chaucer's May-day.** This difference in date is due to the reform of the calendar in 1752, after which dates were reckoned according to the improved Gregorian system. To make the necessary correction the day following September 2nd was called September 14th. During the nineteenth century the difference between the old and new styles was twelve days, hence May 1st (old style) would be May 13th (new style).

Page 24. **Somerset cider or orchard song.** It was formerly the custom in Somerset and Devon to visit the orchards in the autumn or winter in order to drink the health of the apple-trees. Hot ale or cider was drunk and also poured out around the trees, and a song was sung of which the following is one version:—

"Health to thee, good apple-tree!  
May you bear hats full,  
Caps full, three bushel bags full!"

Page 29. **nictitating membrane**, a membrane which acts as a third eyelid in birds. It can be drawn right across the eye.

Page 30. **Red Deer Land.** In his book on the Red Deer, from which this selection is taken, Jefferies marks out the region over which the red deer roam as follows: "With a pencil draw a line on the map from Bridgewater to near Ilfracombe, from Ilfracombe down to Exeter,

and from Exeter up to Bridgewater, enclosing a triangle each side of which on the map would be about fifty miles, but to ride twenty more, on account of the irregular ground."

Page 35. **horns in velvet.** "Each year in March the stag's antlers fall and are replaced by fresh ones. As the new horns grow they are at first soft and even flexible, and are covered with a skin called the velvet; it is of a brown colour, soft, like plush. While this bark or skin remains on the horn the stag is said to be in velvet. By degrees it peels off as the horns become hard, the stag rubbing his head against the trees to get rid of it, and he is then in a fit condition for the chase—that is, he is a *runnable stag*."—JEFFERIES, "Red Deer."

Page 36. **Badgeworthy Water**, one of the headwaters of the Lyn, an Exmoor river entering the Bristol Channel at Lynmouth. (See Atlas.)

Page 38. **warrantable deer**, a stag suitable for the chase. In strict meaning *warrantable* indicates a stag of five years, though occasionally a stag is run at four years old.

Page 39. **Birds of the Farmhouse.** In this selection from "Wild Life in a Southern County" we have a description of the surroundings of Coate Farm.

Page 48. "**upper ten**," the aristocracy.

Page 52. **orange tawny bill.** See *Midsummer Night's Dream*, Act III. sc. 1, ll. 128-9—

"The ouzel cock so black of hue,  
With orange-tawny bill."

ouzel = blackbird.

Page 54. **sarsen-stones**, blocks of sandstone strewn over the Wiltshire downs and south-east England. They are often known as Grey-wethers or as Druid-stones.

Page 55. **Thebes of old Egypt** was at its greatest splendour about 1600 B.C., when it was the capital of Egypt and a chief seat of the worship of Ammon. The city was fourteen miles in circumference, and its ruins, on both banks of the Nile near the modern town of Luxor, are amongst the grandest in the world.

Page 56. **Forty miles, etc.** The notes from which this essay was constructed were no doubt collected at Crowborough. (Compare Introduction.)

Page 61. **oast**, a kiln for drying hops, generally built with a conical roof.

Page 62. **Sinis the Pine-bender**, a robber who lived on the Isthmus of Corinth. He killed his victims by bending down two pine trees, binding the victim hand and foot between them, and then letting the trees separate again. He was killed by Theseus. You may read about him in Kingsley's "Heroes."

Page 83. **Phidias**, born at Athens about 490 B.C., was the most famous sculptor of the age of Pericles, and directed the construction of the celebrated public buildings and other works with which that statesman beautified Athens. His most famous work was a statue of Athene in marble, gold, and ivory.

Page 83. **Meadow Thoughts.** The garden here described is that of Coate Farm as it was in Jefferies' youth. The milestone marked "To London, 79 miles" is at the end of the hamlet of Coate opposite to the farm.

Page 97. **Wheat Fields near London.** This essay is one of a series on nature near London, which were the outcome of Jefferies' residence at Surbiton. (Compare Introduction.)

Page 98. **hard hand-play.** Read Tennyson's version of the Saxon poem describing the Battle of Brunanburh.

Page 100. **gix, wild parsnip.**

Page 106. **dim ages before the Pyramids.** The most important of the Pyramids of Egypt, those at Gizeh near Memphis on the west bank of the Nile, probably date from 3700 B.C. to 3600 B.C.

Page 110. **nail-headed characters.** The reference is to the cuneiform or wedge-shaped form of writing used by the ancient peoples of Assyria, Babylonia, Persia, etc. It is so called from the fact that the component parts of the writing resemble wedges in shape. **Hieroglyphics** is the term applied to the representations of objects such as men, birds, fishes, reptiles, trees, etc., when used as symbols to express language by written forms. Such forms were used for this purpose by the Egyptians and Mexicans.

Page 115. **Sir Bevis and the Wind.** This selection is from "Wood Magic," a story recounting the adventures of Bevis, a little boy who was able to converse with the animals living around him, such as Kapchack the magpie, Choo Hoo the woodpigeon, Kaubaha the rook, Kauc the crow, Clocktaw the jackdaw, and Te-Te the tomtit, and describing the great battle between the forces of Kapchack, the king of the birds, and those of the rebel Choo Hoo.

Page 118. **tumulus,** a mound raised over the burial place of a person. Many of the tumuli on the Downs belong to the people of the New Stone Age.

Page 137. **My Old Village, Coate.**

Page 137. **John Brown,** one of the labourers employed at Coate Farm during Jefferies' boyhood.

Page 140. **Job.** Job Brown, the father of John Brown.

Page 143. **water-bailiff,** the man who had the care of the Coate reservoir. His name was Day.

Page 144. **Domitian persecuted the flies.** Domitian was Emperor of Rome, 81-96 A.D. The beginning of his reign promised happiness to the people; but he soon became cruel, capricious, and vindictive. He passed a great part of the day in catching flies and killing them with a bodkin.

Page 147. **Ptolemy,** a celebrated Egyptian astronomer and geographer. He lived during the second century of the Christian era, and published, among other works, a geography illustrated by twenty-six maps, including a general map of the world which is often reproduced in classical atlases.

Page 149. **little old man with silver buckles.** John Jefferies, the grandfather of Richard.

Page 150. **Ezekiel's wheel dream.** See Ezekiel, chap. i. vers. 15 to 20.

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LONDON AND BECCLES